

CHIFFON'S
MARRIAGE



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GYP.

COMTESSE DE MARTEL.

Chiffon's Marriage

[*le Mariage de Chiffon*]

BY

GYP, pseud.

(COMTESSE DE MARTEL)

Author of "LEURS ÂMES," "M. LE DUC," "DE HAUT EN BAS,"

"PETIT BOB," Etc., Etc.

*Martel de Janville, Sibylle Gabrielle
Marie Antoinette (de Riquetti de
Mirabeau) comtesse de.*

TRANSLATED BY

MYRTIE LEONORA JONES.



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CHIFFON'S MARRIAGE.



CHAPTER I.

"AN officer's wife! What a life! I would rather be" —

The Marquise de Bray shrugged her shoulders:—

"When you know who the officer in question is" — she said.

"Even though it were the much-sought-after M. de Trêne, I should not want him."

"You would not want him, really? And yet you have no right to be so critical, for" —

" 'For your father left nothing but debts, and you have not a penny'! Ah, how well I know that phrase! you have repeated it so often that I cannot forget it. I am sick of it."

"Well, then, what will you do?"

"Money or no money, I will not make a loveless marriage."

"All the more," said M. de Bray timidly, "because, although you are not rich, you have a dot."

"A dot?" said the astonished girl. "Do you give me one, then?"

Her pale, tender gray eyes, smiling through dark lashes, which were remarkably long and thick, rested affectionately upon her step-father.

Somewhat annoyed, Madame de Bray began again dryly: "It is useless to inform her of what she has no need of knowing, and thus make her still more difficult" —

"Difficult in what way?" exclaimed Coryse indignantly. "What do you mean? I was sixteen years old three months ago, and, as far as I know, no one has asked to marry me."

"Yes; some one has; and you refuse before you even know who it is."

"Because I do not wish to marry an officer, never; I have seen enough of them here, these officers' wives. There is no lack of them in the four regiments. I would not be one of them; no, not for anything in the

world. I am not the right sort of person. I am not sufficiently polite. I feel that if my colonel had a wife like Madame de Bassigny, for example, nothing would induce me to call upon her ; nothing !”

Turning as though to look for some support, she asked : “ Am I not right, Uncle Marc ? ”

Without giving Uncle Marc time to answer, Madame de Bray said emphatically : —

“ This is not a matter which concerns your uncle ; will you listen to me for one moment ? — yes or no ? ”

Then she continued very solemnly : —

“ The man who has done you the honor to ask your hand in marriage is the Duc d'Aubières ! ”

She paused, expecting her daughter to be astonished. As a matter of fact Chiffon's delicate little irregular face expressed complete amazement, which Madame de Bray took for joy. She asked triumphantly, “ Well, and what do you say to that ? ”

“ Well,” replied the little creature, trying to laugh, “ I am struck dumb ! ”

Without noticing her mother's threatening look, she went on quickly, “ Yes, he must be

at least forty, M. d'Aubières, because he is a colonel; besides that, he is ugly; and I hear on all sides that he has very little money."

The Marquise cast a look of scorn upon her daughter, and said:—

"Ah, how interesting! Even she demands money!"

Coryse shook her blond head.

"Not at all; money is nothing to me unless I have to be a duke—duchess I mean; but a big title with a small income is absurd! I won't say that if I had been born with a title, I should go and bury it in the cellar simply because I was not rich; no, a title would be a great bore; but I should endure it, because it would not be my fault. Besides, it is not merely because of his title that I say no."

"Is it because of his profession?"

"Above all, it is because of himself."

"But you have repeated a hundred times that M. d'Aubières was charming, and that you were very fond of him."

"Certainly, I like him very much; but not to marry him! In the first place he seems old to me; and then if I had to spend all my time with him, it does not strike me that it would be very amusing."

The marquise cast a glance which was full of vexation at her husband, and observed : —

“ One does not marry merely to find amusement.”

“ I should. That is the only reason which would induce me to marry.”

“ That child is crazy ! I prefer to leave her to herself ;” and rising with a movement which she thought very high-bred, but which was really very ridiculous, the marquise stalked out of the room.

When the door had closed again with a bang, M. de Bray said softly : —

“ You are wrong, my little Coryse, to ” —

Coryse, who in spite of the noisy exit of her mother, had remained quite calm, crouched in the back of an old armchair covered with faded silk, in which she almost disappeared from view, rose abruptly.

“ Why do you call me ‘ Coryse ? ’ Are you angry too ? ”

“ I am not angry at all, but ” —

“ Yes, you are angry ; I see it plainly ; but tell me what you were going to say when I interrupted you.”

“ Nothing. I have forgotten.”

“ I know ; you were saying, ‘ You are wrong to ’ — What am I wrong about ? ”

"To discuss as you have with your mother."

"What! must I let them marry me off in spite of myself?"

"I did not say that."

"Well, what did you say?"

"I said that, without — without" —

"You see, you" —

"But" —

"You are stuck; and I defy you to go on with your explanation. Yes; I must either discuss and prevent this marriage, or keep still and permit it."

"You might, in extremity, discuss it, but in a different tone; above all things, in other terms; your language exasperates your mother."

"Yes; I know she is fond of a lofty style."

Every trace of tenderness, and the look of infinite kindness that had been in the child's eyes, disappeared; and in a hard voice she added: —

"Her own manner is so distinguished!"

"You give me a very great deal of trouble," said M. de Bray sadly.

"What? I, who never meant to give you any! I love you too well."

"And you know that I love you."

"Then, why do you wish to send me away, to marry me off in spite of myself?"

"But I don't wish it."

"Yes, you do; and I am but sixteen and a half years old. I beg of you to leave me in peace; let me live on here for" —

She stopped, and counted on her fingers: "Five years longer, perhaps not quite so long as that, and then I will go. I promise you, I promise you."

The soft blue eyes grew dim; and round tears, like balls of glass, fell without breaking upon her fresh cheeks.

Corysande d'Avèsnès, who was called Coryse, or more commonly Chiffon, was a solid but supple maid, much more of a baby than a young lady, with some of the angles and the awkwardness of childhood, and with the transparent skin which belongs to the very young; that skin beneath which one can trace rosy lights. Her motions, although graceful and quick, were a little *gauche*, recalling those of an overgrown young dog; and they annoyed her mother almost more than her not always correct manner of expressing herself.

Very much in love with herself, the Marquise de Bray looked upon most of those with whom

social obligations compelled her to associate as poor inferior creatures, of no consequence, who ought to feel greatly honored by her condescending to notice them. She had passed her life scorning and tormenting the good and simple people with whom she came in contact.

First, Count d'Avèsnès, the father of Coryse, who had been clever enough to die at the end of two years, before he had been driven to make for himself elsewhere a life which was impossible for him at home. His widow, left without fortune, went with her daughter, and took up her abode with an uncle and aunt who adored the child, and did everything for her up to the time of her mother's second marriage. As to Madame d'Avèsnès, she stayed very little with the de Launeys. She traveled, spending her time in Paris, or visiting friends here and there, unable, so she said, to accustom herself to a provincial life.

It was in the course of one of these visits at Pont-sur-Sarthe that M. de Bray took a fancy to her. He was rich, and very charming. Her beauty was ripe, and she knew that its freshness and brilliancy would soon be gone. So, instead of treating the marquis as she had many others, she quietly and cleverly led him

on to matrimony, resigning herself to a reign in Pont-sur-Sarthe, since she could not shine elsewhere. She married M. de Bray, and gave out on all sides that she had re-married only out of devotion to her daughter, and in order to assure her future.

Then began for the poor husband the same fearful existence made up of complaints and sulkiness, of scenes and reconciliations, which his predecessor had had to endure. The de Launeys had borne everything out of love for their little Chiffon, from whom above all else they dreaded to be separated.

But it was for her daughter that Madame de Bray reserved her worst torments. The child's whole nature offended her ideas, which, while narrow in many ways, were disproportionately broad in others. Spoiled by her love of the nobility, and of money too, since she had had it, caring for pomp and parade above all things, she could never pardon Coryse for a simplicity and frankness which were beyond her own comprehension. Not being naturally of a very decided type, the marquise had created one for herself from various and commonplace models. From the theater she had learned to talk — from novels to think. And inasmuch

as she had at bottom no delicacy of feeling or sentiment, she made bad use of what she did not thoroughly understand; and at times, as when she intended to be tragic, for example, the results were so intensely comic that Chiffon would go off into gales of laughter.

Very ordinary herself in looks and carriage, Madame de Bray continually reproached her daughter with being *common*, and with not possessing that distinction which *was the natural right of the Avèsnès*.

When he saw that Coryse, who almost never cried, was in tears, M. de Bray, quite upset, could think of nothing but how he might console her.

"Come, Chiffon, dearest, be reasonable," he said; "it will all come out right."

She replied with a discouraged shake of her dishevelled head:—

"You mean it will come out right if I marry M. d'Aubières? I should ask nothing better, if I did not feel that in doing so I should do wrong and so make him unhappy. I should marry him at once, so that they might be rid of me. That's what they want."

"It is cruel for you to say that to me."

"I do not mean you; you know that."

"But your mother has no more desire than I have to see you go."

"Don't you believe it; she thinks of nothing else. She is afraid that I shall not be married, or, more likely, that I shall not make a good match; not because she wants me to be happy; oh, no, that is a mere detail; but from pure vanity, that she may have the satisfaction of knowing that this one or that one is jealous of her; that she may dazzle the people in Pont-sur-Sarthe, and annoy her friends. It is for nothing else."

"I am grieved to hear you speak so of your mother, Coryse."

"I cannot help it; I must say what I think."

"Exactly, but you ought not to think such things."

"And why should I not think them? Why should I believe that she loves me? Before you came to live with us, did she ever notice me except to scold me, or to scold those whom she accused of spoiling me? If it had not been for my uncle and aunt, and later for you, should I ever have been cared for and petted? She embraced me twice a year, when she left and when she returned from her travels. She always did it under the port-

cochère, were I was clinging to my nurse's skirts, and trembling because of her return to the house which was so calm when she was not there. With what emotion she would cry, 'My Ccysande, my precious child!' One might have taken it for a scene from a play, where they had found me at the bottom of a cavern and brought me back to earth. She would clasp me so tight to her breast that I would lose my breath; all this was for the benefit of the servants and the driver of the omnibus, who was unloading the luggage; but as they knew her well, she could not take them in. But that made no difference; they had this little melodrama offered them with great regularity just the same."

Growing serious again, the child concluded amiably:—

"She has always lacked simplicity; you know that."

"You exaggerate her imperfections."

"Exaggerate, I? You cannot believe what you say, you who never pose, who trouble yourself so little about the effect you are producing."

"You enjoy opposing your mamma in all sorts of little nothings."

“‘Your mamma!’ Take care; she will hear you!”

And as M. de Bray glanced toward the door, she cried, “You are afraid, aren’t you?”

Then in a solemn tone she added: “To have forgotten that ‘mamma’ is a word of the common people, a word one should leave to servants! Well-born people express themselves differently!”

“Since it is her weakness to insist upon this, why not satisfy her?”

“I do satisfy her, indeed I do! When I speak to her, I don’t call her anything; I evade it; but in speaking of her, I say ‘my mother.’ It fills my mouth full, but not my heart! Ah! it is not my fault; I have tried more than ever since you have taken poor papa’s place. You have been so good to the ugly little savage who did not want to see you at all at first; but since I have known you I have loved you very dearly, and I should have been glad to love your wife. But, indeed, I could not.”

“What you say is terrible.”

“Why is it? I am very properly fond of her. I should be sorry if anything happened to her, and I wish her only happiness; but

when I don't see her I breathe easier ; that is sure."

Noticing her step-father's look, she went on :—

"But, you know, all this that I have told you, I have not breathed to another soul."

"It is well," stammered the poor man, in consternation.

"It is a fact ; I have no confidence in any one but you."

She glanced over her shoulder at Count de Bray, who was sitting quite silent in a bamboo easy-chair and added :—

"And in Uncle Marc too ; why don't you say something, Marc ?"

Uncle Marc, a tall, fine-looking young man, replied in resonant tones :—

"Because I have nothing to say. A while ago when I spoke, your mother shut me up ; consequently"—

"I know she did ; but now that she is no longer here"—

"Since she left us you have said some very true things, my poor girl ; and as I cannot explain them, I preserve a discreet silence."

"You are good too" she said.

"Oh, excellent ! But let me alone, foolish

child," he added, rising, and suddenly pushing Coryse, who had climbed on his knees like a big baby, onto the floor.

"Why do you push me like that?" she asked in surprise.

"Because you are too big for such monkey tricks. At your age do you think it good manners?"

"Manners! what has manners to do with it? Can't I climb on my uncle's lap any more?"

Then with a comical little air of reserve, she said: "If you were not my uncle" —

"That's the point," answered Marc gruffly; "that's the point; I am *not* your uncle."

Throwing herself down, she burst into sobs, her face buried in the cushions of the divan.

"What's the matter with the child to-day?" inquired Uncle Marc, annoyed. "She who usually does not cry easily bursts into tears at the slightest thing. It is unbearable."

"Do not be too harsh," rejoined M. De Bray; "she is nervous over the matter of this marriage."

"I can understand that" —

"Take care that she does not hear you; she would send Aubières to the devil for good and all."

"Well, you are not going to permit this monstrosity, I hope?"

"Her mother is determined upon it."

"She is crazy. Aubières is twenty-five years older than Chiffon."

"If I can believe what I hear, the little Liron adores you; and she is at least twenty years younger than you are."

"Admitting that that is so, she adores me to-day; but how will it be to-morrow?"

"I may mention also the example of our mother, who was twenty-five years younger than her husband, and who loved him passionately always."

"And I reply that these are examples which one finds only in one's own family, fortunately. In the meantime poor Chiffon is crying as if she would break her heart." He went to the couch, and, laying his hand on the back of her rosy neck, said affectionately:—

"I beg your pardon, Chiffon, dear, for having caused you pain."

She raised her disheveled head, and asked:

"Why were you so horrid? Why did you tell me that you were not my uncle?"

"Because, although I love you just as much

as if I were, I am not ! I am the brother of your mother's husband ; and I am nothing to you. I could even marry you if I were not a contemporary of my friend d'Aubières whom you are so prompt to dismiss."

"What !" asked the child in astonishment, "you the age of M. d'Aubières ?"

And she added, laughing : —

"But you are not so 'gone to pieces' as he, as the people say in Pont-sur-Sarthe. Yes, the other day I was talking in the street with an old man who used that very expression to explain to me that his wife's health was somewhat broken."

"You were talking in the street with an old man ? What old man ?"

"An old man whom I met on my way back from my class the other day. Jean was with me. I think he was a crossing-sweeper or a rag-man."

"If your mother had seen you talking with this man, what would have happened ?"

"She would have been wild, I know ; but she did not see me."

Then, turning abruptly to Uncle Marc, she said : —

"Well, anyway, whether you are really my

uncle or not, for five years I have called you my uncle, and believed that you were, just as I have believed, without going very deep into it, that papa was papa. In any case you can give me your advice, can you not? Shall I, or shall I not, marry M. d'Aubières?"

"Your question is embarrassing."

"If you were in my place, what would you do?"

"In your place — Gad! — I would examine myself" —

"It is just because I have done so, that" —

"Before saying 'no' I would see d'Aubières a few times; I would reflect."

"You think, then, that if I saw him often I might change my mind? To me it seems just the other way."

"Aubières is clever; he is kind and well-bred; he must improve on acquaintance. Without being rich, he has a comfortable fortune and an historic name.

"Oh, ye gods! I know that he is historic; I have been told so often enough. They go on enough about it. As for historic names, I have one myself, and you know one is not apt to nab at the things one already has; it is the things one has not, that one demands,"

"What do you demand?"

She reflected a moment, and then said resolutely:—

"A great deal of love, or, if that is asking too much, a very great deal of money, so that there need be no more poor people in Pont-sur-Sarthe. Then I should buy pictures and fine horses; and I should have a concert every evening; and it would never be boresome at my house"—

"That word 'boresome' again. What if your mother should hear you?"

"Yes; but she does not!"

A servant opened the door and announced:—

"Madame la Marquise wishes to speak to M. le Marquis and to M. le Comte before dinner; and she begs that Mademoiselle will go and dress."

"Dress! Is any one to be here?" cried Coryse in astonishment, turning with a laugh to her stepfather and her uncle:—

"It must be M. d'Aubières, and she wants to give you some pointers. Trot along, and I will go and put on my old pink gown. It is more soiled, and not so pretty as this; but it is an evening gown."

Looking at M. de Bray, who went out followed by his brother, she murmured, her eyes big with tears all ready to fall :—

“It is a shame that the only two beings who love me do not belong to me in any way.”

Then, as her stepfather turned to answer, she added quickly :—

“Not the only two. It was not nice of me to say that. I forgot Uncle Albert and Aunt Mathilde, who love me dearly, and who are really related to me.”

Then, seized with a sudden idea, she darted from the room, slipping under M. de Bray's arm as he stood holding the door open for her.

“I had quite forgotten,” she said, laughing; “I am to dine with them this evening.”

She raised her voice, and continued with emphasis :—

“You will tell ‘my mother,’ if she has forgotten it.” And she tripped down the stairs.

CHAPTER II.

CHIFFON had rushed to her room, clapped a hat on her blond head, and entered the servants' room like a bomb, where she seized upon old Jean, who started forth with her, complaining that his cotton gloves were too small for his big hands.

"Come, quick! take me to Aunt Mathilde's."

"But, Mademoiselle, you forget. We have people coming to dinner, and I have to go to the door. They may arrive at any moment."

You have plenty of time; you can be back immediately; we will run."

"Oh, we will run, will we?" muttered the old coachman. "In this heat it will be pleasant to run!"

He finished putting on his gloves, spreading his fingers wide apart, and working them in with an awkward, regular movement. Coryse took him by the arm, and shook him.

Then she said, "Come, hurry up, or I shall get a scolding."

The old man stood with his fingers apart like the spokes of a wheel, and said in astonishment: "A scolding! have you not had permission to go?"

"I have, and I haven't. Come, come."

"I believe you are fooling me; that you really have it."

"Yes, I have, from papa."

"That is as bad as though you did not have it at all. Permissions from M. le Marquis are like his orders; he might as well keep still."

As they crossed the dining-room she exclaimed as she saw the table, "Are there to be several guests for dinner? I thought there was only M. d'Aubières. Stop, Jean, where are you going?"

"To get my hat which hangs in the harness-room. I will catch up with you."

He rejoined Coryse, who was scampering across the court, and began to walk a few steps behind her. Suddenly she turned around saying:—

"You know M. d'Aubières; what do you think of him?"

"I think he is a fine officer."

"Well, Jean, they want me to marry him."

"Impossible!" said the old coachman, with

such palpable dismay that the child began to laugh as she looked at him.

"Oh, impossible! he might be your father."

"True; but they wish it all the same; at least, Madame la Marquise does."

"It is because he has a grand name, 'M. le duc d'Aubières!'" said the old man, who knew the tastes of his mistress.

"Come along beside me," ordered Coryse, who found it awkward to turn as she walked; "you'll give me a stiff neck."

"I must not walk beside you, Mademoiselle; the Marquise has expressly forbidden it. 'In the street,' she says, 'the servants must walk five steps behind Mademoiselle when they accompany her.'"

"The others; not you. You are more like a nurse. She could not lay down such rules for you; here we are!"

Jean looked at the old granite mansion which loomed opposite them on the Place du Palais, a dull gray silhouette, and muttered with a deep sigh:—

"That's a fine house, where we were well off, with a good master and a good mistress. Not that I would say a word against M. le Marquis, no one is better than he; but he can't often

do as he likes; while M. and Madame de Launey both do as they like, but it's always what the other likes."

"Do you regret that you ever left them?"

"I don't regret it, for I left them to be with you, and I *am* with you; but when you are married to M. le duc d'Aubières, or to some one else, I shall not stay long with Madame la Marquise.

"I am wrong to complain to you," he said, as Chiffon made no reply, "because, of course, she is your mamma, and because you are more to be pitied than I, for I can leave if I want to, and you can't."

After a pause, the old man, following out his train of thought, asked:—

"Do you think they'll take me back, M. and Madame de Launey? They know I only left to be with you, Mademoiselle; and since I left them their horses have never been so fine, or so fat, or so shiny."

"But you know very well, Jean, that you will stay with me always; that when I go, I shall take you with me."

With eyes filled with tears the old coachman leaned towards her, touched, but happy.

"What, you would still keep in your service

an old man like me, not good-looking, not stylish?"

"Yes; I like you as you are, dear old nurse; but it's true, nevertheless, you are not pretty."

Letting fall the knocker, she cried:—

"Run along while I wait; you have barely time;" and laughing without noticing the terrified look on the poor man's face, she said:—

"You may not be very well received when you get back, you know."

Chiffon's appearance in the de Launeys' dining-room was a real event. They were just sitting down to dinner. Aunt Mathilde and Uncle Albert both rose with a cry of delight; and even the servant gave a growl of satisfaction.

For every one adored Chiffon in the old house where her early childhood had been passed, and to which she returned with such delight whenever she could escape.

She was ten years old when her mother, at her second marriage, took her away from the two old people who had come to feel that she was really their own. It was a terrible trial for them, — terrible also for the child, who was afraid of the future.

Scolded and tormented by her mother from the time of her earliest remembrance, cared for and petted by her old uncle and aunt since she had first known them, then buffeted and cajoled during the short stays of Madame d'Avèsnès at Pont-sur-Sarthe, Coryse, whose temperament was naturally gay, although easily affected by her surroundings, lived in a state of perpetual uneasiness. When quite a small child she began to think, as she sat in her own little chair under the steady gaze of the family portraits in corselet and armor, and between the two old people who never tired of gazing upon her curly head, that it was good to be alive and to laugh, to roll on the carpet of the big dining-room, or on the grass in the mournful old garden, which to her was full of sunshine and delight. She thought it was amusing to talk with the dogs, the horses, the birds, the playthings, and the flowers. But all this would not last. Some day — to-morrow, perhaps, toward evening — the big gate at the entrance would open, a carriage whose rumbling she knew full well would enter, and Uncle Albert, bending toward her from his great height, would say with some embarrassment as he kissed her: —

“Chiffon, my child, your mother is coming; you must go down to meet her with Claudine.”

They never forewarned her of the return of Madame d'Avèsnès. Her uncle and aunt had noticed that if they told her, she could neither sleep nor eat. She would have frequent crying spells, but would put on a brave face at the last moment, resigned to what had to be. And then, obedient to her uncle, she would take in her little hand a corner of Claudine's apron, and go down with dry eyes and with scarcely a turn of her lip, while Claudine, deeply moved, would say to her in her big, encouraging voice:—

“Come, Chiffon, be a good girl.”

Then she would answer, in a frightened voice that she could even then recall: “You must be sure to call me ‘Mademoiselle;’ you know she wants you to; remember, now, won't you?”

While there was no doubt that the scenes and scoldings which were showered upon her irritated Coryse, she did not mind them so much as the scenes and scoldings which others had to endure.

The sight of Aunt Mathilde crying in her room, or of a discharged servant dragging his

trunk down the stairs, was enough to make her teeth chatter, and to keep her eyes wide open the whole night long. All these things were brought to mind by the sound of the big carriage, whose rumbling she seemed always to hear, even at her play; and she saw its outline, with its pile of luggage on top, even when she was gazing upon the things she loved the best—the water, the fire, and the flowers.

For years Chiffon had lived, happy but pre-occupied, unable to forget, in the course of eight or ten months of quiet, certain days of wretchedness past and to come; bending in advance her strong and supple back in expectation of the shock which she foresaw.

She received the announcement of the mother's marriage with great indifference, until she learned that she would have to leave the old house where she had grown up and the aged relatives who had watched over her so tenderly. She knew the Marquis de Bray by sight. She had often seen him riding by-with his brother Marc, and she had always thought him very "chic" and very nice. But when she learned that he was to marry her mother, she decided that he must be like her; and it

seemed to her that her judgment-day had come. However, she could control herself when she felt that it was necessary; so she did not show her fears, but was satisfied with protesting silently. To Madame d'Avèsnès, who announced to her in high-sounding phrases that it was purely from maternal love and in the interests of her future that she was marrying again, she did not say a word. And when they were looking for her to present her to M. de Bray, who had come to call at the Launeys', she went to hide in a clump of hydrangeas at the back of the garden where they could not find her.

At the wedding in the gloomy cathedral she was pale, her mouth was drawn, her eyes fixed; she understood vaguely that she was giving up the last of the poor father whom she had never known, and who might, perhaps, have loved her. And so it was with sorrow and bitterness in her heart that the child came into her new home.

M. de Bray from the first grew fond of Chiffon. Divining her feelings, he did not attempt to anticipate the time which should bring them together; and it was because of his wife's unreasonable character that he and Chiffon finally

came to understand each other. Worn out with the storms, the tears, and the bursts of temper of the marquise, these two beings, both so cheerful and so good, clung instinctively to one another for support.

Almost without knowing it, they made opportunities to be together, and before long it came to pass that Chiffon was contented and happy only when her stepfather was with her.

The child had always tried to conceal her fear of her mother. At the sound of her voice in anger, she affected an irritating composure, and lifted her nose impertinently, even though she felt her teeth chattering, and her limbs trembling at the same time. But one night she betrayed herself. Madame de Bray, in a rage, pursued her across the hall. She clutched the balustrade, and sliding down it dashed into the library. There, thinking herself alone, she threw herself against the door, breathless and in terror, and listened to hear if her mother were in pursuit.

Marc de Bray, who lived with his brother, was sitting smoking in a big easy-chair at some distance from the lamp. He called the child softly. She turned round, sorry to be

surprised at a moment of weakness and abandon.

"What!" she cried, "are you here, you?"

"Yes, indeed, Mademoiselle Corysande," Marc answered somewhat jocosely; "I am here; do I disturb you?"

Chiffon never told a lie. She came toward him, and said crossly, "Yes, you do. You have seen me afraid, and I don't like it."

He laughed, and looking at her affectionately said:—

"You are a dear girl. If you were afraid of ghosts or of a cannon, I should tell you that it was beneath you as a descendant of the Avèsnes. But of your mother! My poor child, I am afraid of her myself, old as I am; so you see I can understand you."

"What!" murmured Coryse, gaining confidence, "you too? You don't show it."

"I don't show it when she is here; that would please her too much; but I pay up for it later, and I fairly shake in my boots. This morning at breakfast when she caught poor Joseph I tried to keep still, to contain myself, but my throat contracted on a prune, and you saw how I fled, glad of an excuse, and went and choked in peace in the hall."

Then, growing serious, he continued : —

“ Chiffon, you ought to tell my brother about these things. You ought to confess to him frankly your fears and your sorrows.”

“ What could he do ? ” she replied indifferently.

“ Gad ! he is the master, after all.” Chiffon's eyes opened wide.

“ He ? Impossible.”

Marc de Bray laughed heartily.

“ I know it does not seem so. Your stepfather has a horror of scenes and disputes. He prefers to give up in matters which concern only himself ; but in what concerns you it is another matter, for the sake of your father, whose friend he was, and for your own sake too ; for he is very fond of you, very. And I am too ; I love you dearly, Chiffon ; and if we have never talked much of this affection, it is because it is not easy to approach a little porcupine like you.”

Just then his brother came in, and he said to him : —

“ Come, Pierre, tell Chiffon that we are her friends, and I have an idea that to-night she will believe you.”

From that day a great affection grew in the

lonely heart of the child, and she lived more contentedly.

"How did you happen to come to-night, Chiffon?" asked Uncle Albert delightedly. "I thought you had company to dinner."

She shut one eye with the droll grimace of a street urchin.

"M. d'Aubières, eh?" she said, jumping rough-shod right into the question. Then, without giving them time to answer, she said:—

"In my place, tell me, would you marry M. d'Aubières?"

"Why, Chiffon!" stammered Aunt Mathilde timidly, indicating by a glance the servant who was bringing in some dish to the table.

"Bah! what's the difference? M. d'Aubières must have made his offer about four o'clock; they told me of it at five; this evening part of the town will know it, and to-morrow my mother will inform the rest. It sounds well; that's the way they do things in Pont-sur Sarthe. They say it has eighty thousand inhabitants, but that does not prevent a rumor making the rounds with astonishing rapidity. You knew, didn't you, that M. d'Aubières wanted to marry me?"

"We knew it from your mother," said M. de Launey. "She came to tell us, and to invite us to your house this evening."

"Exactly; they want to present him to the family, and to force me to say 'yes.' "

"But there is no need of presenting him to us," protested her aunt; "we have known him ever since he came to the garrison, and that was a long while ago."

"It is about a year. The first time Uncle Marc brought him to dinner, he sat next to me. I was still in short dresses. He talked to me constantly of hunting and of paper-chases. Oh! but that dinner was boresome to me!"

"Chiffon!" said Madame de Launey in a tone of reproof, "that horrid word again."

She was astonished.

"Horrid word; which one? Oh, is it 'bore-some' that you call a horrid word? are you as particular as that, Aunt Mathilde?"

"You are not particular enough. Your mother is right when she complains of your manners and bad language; yes, you have the manners of a boy, and you talk like the children in the street."

"Quite likely. They were the only ones

that I cared to listen to when I was little. It is not my fault that I could never find a word to say to my cousins the de Lussy girls, or to the 'general's little daughters' as Claudine used to call them. They used to come to luncheon with me, all dressed up in silk gowns, and with their hair curled on an iron. In vain I racked my brain; I sat with folded arms opposite them, laughing stupidly, feeling how ridiculous I was, but unable to do anything. Theirs was the language I had been taught to speak, but I could hardly understand them; they made their *liaisons*; and there is nothing that troubles me like that—it's so funny. It seems as though one were at a play. Don't you think so? Uncle Albert, do you see my point?"

"Yes, yes, I see your point; but don't talk so much, and eat your dinner; it will get cold."

"It would be good just the same; beef is so good. Another thing we never have at our house."

"I believe your mother does not like it."

"She likes it well enough; it's not that; but she does not wish to have it served at her table. She says it is common; and anything

that is common, whether it is a dish or something else" —

"Yes, beef is good — eat some."

"In the meantime you have not yet given me the advice I asked for."

"Why should I?"

"For the sake of M. d'Aubières."

"But in a case of this kind, my dear child, you should take counsel only with yourself. M. d'Aubières pleases your mother; it is now for you to see whether he pleases you."

"He pleases me; yes, he certainly pleases me, as far as I know him; but I have never looked upon him from that point of view, and I am positive that as soon as I begin to do so, I shall" —

Aunt Mathilde interposed: —

"You must see him again; see him often; because he comes frequently to your house. Study him well, and when you have done so" —

"What shall I do then, after I have studied him well?"

"You will find out what answer you wish to give him."

"I shall reply, 'Zut.'"

"Zut?"

Chiffon began to laugh.

"It is awfully funny, Aunt Mathilde, to hear you say 'Zut.' You don't put any meaning in it at all."

"No meaning?"

"No; 'zut' is a word which means 'come off,' 'run along,' or something like that; so you must say it more deliberately, don't you see?"

"Do you imagine that at my age I ought to learn how to talk slang?"

"I should like to hear you. You don't usually stick at a thing like that, Aunt Mathilde; and you often do use expressions quite equal to 'boresome,' let it be said without reproach."

"I am sorry if I do."

"Not at all; it is at such times that I am most fond of you; and, do you know, that is one thing I like about M. d'Aubières, he has no airs. I am quite sure that my way of talking would not shock him the least in the world."

"What is your father's opinion about this marriage; and your uncle's?"

"Papa does not say much; he is satisfied with praising M. d'Aubières. As for Uncle

Marc, he tells me to examine myself; and then when he thought that I was not listening because I was crying in a corner" —

Both uncle and aunt interrupted anxiously: —

"You were crying?"

"Put yourself in my place if you think it is funny. Besides, I was not crying about that. It was about something else. Well, when they thought I was not listening, they were counting up the people of their acquaintance who adored each other in spite of twenty or twenty-five years difference in their ages."

"Did they mention us?"

"No."

"Well, Chiffon, I was eighty-one years old yesterday; your aunt is only sixty."

"Is that so? And yet you appear to get on very well," replied Chiffon, who was hanging on the arm of her old uncle on the way to the drawing-room.

"I have ordered the carriage at half-past eight o'clock," said Madame de Launey; "I am going to get ready."

"The carriage, in this weather, to go only a few rods!"

Then, suddenly enlightened, she said: —

"That was not your own idea; I will wager that it was not!"

"No; it was your mother who" —

"Who told you to come in your carriage because you have fine horses; then, as everybody goes at about the same time, you would attract attention. It is to impress M. d'Aubières. Oh, tra-la-la; always the same old story."

While the Launeys were preparing to go out, Chiffon, seated in a rocking-chair, gazed fondly upon the sumptuous drawing-room where she had played so often in other days. She loved the old Empire furniture, with the gilt sphynxes, and its covering of Utrecht velvet with canary yellow stripes; and its little low cupboards concealed by the white wainscoting where she had been allowed to keep her playthings. And then the beautiful Louis XV. screen, so smiling and perfect, with its satyrs and nymphs chasing each other through thickets! Then there was the old clock with eagles, and the Sèvres vases, charming but tiresome.

Chiffon lived over again her happy childhood hours; and it was with an air of conviction that she said to the old people when they called her:—

"It is terribly nice here."

When they reached the Bray mansion, she ran up the stairs ahead of her uncle and aunt, calling to them : —

"Say that I am coming. I must dress. I should be caught if I came in with you; and I am going to present myself in my old pink gown."

CHAPTER III.

WHEN she slipped into the brightly lighted drawing-room, Coryse stopped in the manner peculiar to near-sighted persons, to examine the company, who, seated in a wide circle, were talking and laughing. She hesitated a moment as though in doubt as to whom she ought to speak first. Then she went up to an elderly lady with a clear-cut profile, and greeted her in a way which, in comparison with her ordinary manner, seemed very respectful. Coryse liked the Countess de Jarville for many reasons. She thought her distinguished in spite of her modest ways, and she believed her to be really good and intelligent. Moreover, Madame de Bray could not abide the old lady, a distant relative of her husband, who, with her faded gowns and her resemblance to a pale old portrait, persisted in casting a gloom upon her receptions. This dislike in itself would have sufficed to create in Chiffon a certain sympathy for the countess.

"Corysande," said the marquise in a curt tone, "come and say good-evening to Madame de Bassigny."

Madame de Bassigny was the wife of a colonel and Chiffon's *bête noir*. Very rich and very affected, she delighted in tormenting and annoying all the officers' families in Pont-sur-Sarthe; and she punished severely all the bachelor officers who neglected her reception day.

Coryse turned, and answered with an indifference which bordered upon impertinence.

"In a moment, as soon as I have spoken to Madame de Jarville."

The marquise cast a furious look at her daughter; and M. d'Aubières' kind blue eyes, filled with admiration and pleasure, were also fixed upon her. He, too, detested the wife of his colleague in the hussars, and he was delighted with the utter lack of enthusiasm which Chiffon so deliberately put into her manner.

This thin, scrawny woman, who had, as he said, a beak for an elbow and a bone for a back, ugly as sin, loquacious as a magpie, and as full of gossip as a *concièrge*, who slandered pretty women, and made fun of poor

and ugly ones, was his particular abomination.

Too frank to conceal this antipathy entirely, M. d'Aubières confined himself to the simplest forms of politeness.

At first Madame de Bassigny had been extremely agreeable to him, as she was anxious to attract this good-looking bachelor who bore so great a name. Her fondest wish was to have the most elegant and the most popular receptions in Pont-sur-Sarthe; and she saw at once that the presence of the Duc d'Aubières was indispensable in establishing their supremacy. A duke in almost any environment is something of a lion; but in the provinces he becomes a great one.

As soon as Colonel d'Aubières had arrived, people said, "He is doubtless a duke of the Empire;" and they looked upon him with curiosity. But when they learned that the title of the Aubières dated from before the revision of 1667, curiosity became admiration. And as the duke with his little fortune made a very good appearance; as he had good horses which he rode well, a well-appointed carriage, and a small house all to himself, which was filled, so they said, with nice things, he was

greatly sought after by all the mothers, widows, and *cocottes* of Pont-sur-Sarthe. But in spite of the attentions heaped upon him by Colonel and Madame de Bassigny, he continued to be formal and reserved, contenting himself with being polite to them and nothing more. Madame de Bray, more fortunate than her friend, had the pleasure of producing the Duc d'Aubières at her receptions. He was very intimate with her step-brother, Marc, who introduced him without the fear that she would receive with her habitual disdain a personage so distinguished.

Although all the prettiest women of the place paid court to him, including Madame de Bray herself, who, though no longer young, was still attractive, the duke himself neither sought nor saw any one but the slender, vigorous girl, who, something of a dreamer and something of a tomboy, laughed with him in affectionate confidence, quite unmindful of the "swell" young men who adorned her mother's salon. He guessed at some of the petty annoyances of Chiffon's life; Uncle Marc told him the rest; and all unconsciously, at the age of forty-three, he began to love the fifteen-year-old child who laughed so merrily with him.

When M. d'Aubières became aware of what was going on in his still youthful heart, he thought, "I am a fool." Then, whilst dreaming of this marriage, which seemed at first so impossible, he came at last to ask himself, "Why not?"

And this evening the poor man, timid and distressed, sought Chiffon's eye in order to read in it the expression which had been produced by his offer, which seemed to him in his great modesty presumptuous and absurd. But Chiffon steadily avoided looking at him. After having bowed formally to Madame de Bassigny she began to talk with a poor, frail-looking young man, with a retreating forehead and chin, the Vicomte de Barfleur, a descendant of one of the oldest families of the country, and one of the eligible men of Pont-sur-Sarthe. Although to judge from the somewhat bored and distracted manner of the girl, their conversation seemed quite devoid of interest, M. d'Aubières, irritated to see her talking to any one, took a violent dislike to the innocent person, who was not in the least to blame.

Suddenly Geneviève de Lussy, a tall, handsome girl, and a cousin of the Avèsnès, exclaimed : —

"Chiffon, why did you not come to the reading to-day?"

"What," said Madame de Bray, astonished, "what do you mean, did she not go at all?"

Coryse blushed, and suddenly left little Barfleur. Stepping up to her mother, she said: —

"No, I did not go; I stayed in the garden."

Then turning to M. de Bray with a supplicating look, she added: —

"It was so beautiful."

"Where did you go?"

"I just told you; I stayed in the garden."

"Doing nothing?"

"No."

"What were you doing?"

"I was looking at the flowers."

"Just as I said."

Then, as though she felt it her duty to keep herself informed, in order to oversee her daughter's studies and to help her make up her lost lessons, the mother asked: —

"What did you do in the class to-day, Geneviève?"

"Let me see," said the girl, trying to col-

lect her thoughts; "it was all about reproduction to-day."

In the midst of an astonished silence she went on: "the reproduction of phanerogamous plants."

Uncle Marc shrugged his shoulders, saying in low tones:—

"Chiffon is right to study the flowers in her own garden. That, at least, has no unpleasant results."

The marquise, who was in total ignorance of phanerogamous or any other plants, and who had not grasped a word of the foregoing conversation, said with a wise, protecting manner:—

"You have heard, Coryse, what your uncle says?"

Coryse did not answer; Geneviève went on speaking to her:—

"Tuesday the lecture is to be on *Britannicus*."

"I am going!" cried Chiffon. "I am so fond of *Racine*."

Little Barfleur knew that a man of the world ought always to take some part in the conversation, no matter what the subject, so he asked with polite indifference:—

“And why, Mademoiselle, are you so fond of Racine?”

“I don't know,” replied Chiffon, also indifferent. Then, after a moment's reflection, she said, “Perhaps it is because they wanted to make me like Corneille.”

Marc de Bray laughed; his step-sister turned upon him angrily.

“One would suppose that you wanted her to appear more absurd and unbearable than she is!”

“I?” said Uncle Marc, astonished.

“Yes, you. You laugh at all her absurdities; you seem to find them amusing.” She was about to go on; her voice rose high in the midst of the silence. Annoyed at being criticised in this way, Chiffon interposed, with flashing eyes and nose in the air, as if for battle:—

“How would it be if you were all to converse again as you were doing, instead of paying so much attention to me?”

One of the doors of the drawing-room, which opened into the garden, was ajar. Without stopping to judge of the effect produced by her proposition, she went out, and down the steps where her best friend, Gri-

bouille, was waiting for her. He was an enormous dog, short and stocky, a silly fellow, with a ferocious look.

The night was bright, but there was no moon. It was one of those nights which Chiffon loved, full of dampness and of perfume. Followed by Gribouille, she wandered away from the house to the farther end of the garden. The heavy odor of white petunias drew her on. When she came near to the long bed, which looked pale and white in the midst of the dark lawn, she bent over, seized with sudden longing to roll in the fragrant blossoms, and to enjoy their odor; but she stopped, thinking that she might do them harm.

For Chiffon, who was convinced that flowers suffer, never touched them except with infinite delicacy and tender care.

The noise of a step on the walk made Gribouille growl; and she guessed at once that it was M. d'Aubières who was advancing in the darkness.

Distinguishing vaguely the light spot where Chiffon stood, he asked:—

“Is that you, Mademoiselle Coryse?”

“Yes, Monsieur.”

Hesitatingly he continued.

"Will you permit me to talk with you for a moment?"

"Why, certainly."

"Have you — did they tell you that — that" —

She took pity on his embarrassment.

"Yes; I know that to-day you asked for my hand in marriage."

With parched throat he whispered, —

"Well?"

"Well, I was not expecting anything of the kind, as you may imagine; and I must say it surprised me a little. Yes, a good deal, if you don't mind my saying so."

"Why should it? Have you not guessed that for a long time I have loved you?"

She answered quite sincerely: —

"Oh, no, I assure you I have not."

"It is true, nevertheless; I have loved you ever since I have known you."

"That is too much. I am very sure that the day you met me first, I could not have made a very agreeable impression. No, indeed!"

"The first day?"

"Yes; at dinner, that night I sat next you,

I must have seemed very stupid to you ; I was dumb as an oyster. It is true that you bored me a good deal too, with your hunts and your paper-chases, and all that stuff."

"But," murmured the poor man, confused, "I did not know what to talk to you about."

"I assure you that I am grateful to you for not having talked army to me ; you might have done that."

"You are making fun of me — you find me absurd, tiresome."

"Oh, no, not at all," she protested promptly, "never that ; I even like you very much ; I am pleased when I see you, — accidentally, that is, — but if it were to be always, always, all the time" —

"Then you do not mean to accept me?"

Chiffon longed to answer plain "no" to his plain question ; in that way, at least, it would all be over and need never be mentioned again ; but she perceived so much distress in the poor, smothered voice which questioned her, so much supplication in the tall figure leaning toward her, that she did not have the courage to cause a real sorrow to this friend who seemed to be so fond of her. So she answered very prettily : —

"No ; I have not decided yet. I am flattered and very grateful for your affection, but I am only a little girl. I have not thought much about serious things ; let me reflect, will you ? Do not ask me to say either 'yes' or 'no' at once, for in that case I should say 'no.'"

"I will wait for your decision, but may I be allowed to plead my cause a little ?" Then noticing that Coryse was moving toward the house, he quietly took her arm, and made her retrace her steps.

"I beg you to give me a few moments more ; your mother told me I might find you here."

"I thought as much !" Chiffon exclaimed with decision ; and she added to herself, "She can never let me alone."

M. d'Aubières went on, his beautiful voice solemn and full of feeling. "I seem old to you ; but I offer you a heart that is young, a heart that has never belonged to any one."

"Oh," said Coryse, with a bewildered look, "you have not reached your age without ever loving any one, have you ?"

He replied very gravely : "Not what I mean by loving, never."

"And what do you mean by loving?"

"I mean giving all my heart and all my life."

"Well, is not that what loving always means?"

"Always? Well — no — that depends," stammered M. d'Aubières embarrassed.

"Stop!" said Chiffon brusquely, "I should like to tell you that I don't believe you, not the least in the world."

"You do not believe me; why not?"

"H'm — well — it is a little hard to tell you. But one day last spring — I was riding with Uncle Marc in the forest of Crisville, and I spied you in the distance — with a lady. I recognized you at once, — there is no one in Pont-sur-Sarthe as tall as you, — you were walking, and a carriage was following you; one of those ridiculous little cabs from the stand on the Place du Palais. The lady — it was one of those ladies one is not supposed to talk about, except my mother and Madame de Bassigny; and they step aside if they meet one of them in the street or at the circus rather than touch them, for they think it injures you in some way. I beg your pardon for saying that about some one you love."

"I?" protested the duke, half in laughter, half in vexation.

"Or whom you did love at least." Quite imperturbably Chiffon went on: "Then I said to Uncle Marc, 'Hello, M. d'Aubières with one of those unmentionable ladies!' Oh, yes; and I forgot to tell you — Paul de Lussy, Geneviève's brother, the one who is a lawyer, you know, was wild about that very same person; and Georgette Guibray, your general's daughter, pointed her out to Geneviève one day in the park, and said, 'Do you know that is the woman for whom your brother got himself into so much trouble?' Geneviève pointed her out to me, and I asked papa at breakfast the next morning to explain it all to me. Heavens! what a cyclone there was! My mother rose, waved her napkin, and called me 'shameless child!' I was scared stiff; I did not understand what it was all about; and after breakfast papa took me into the smoking-room and told me I must never speak of it, especially before my mother, and that, besides, it was better to ignore such people entirely, for they live in a little world of their own. That night when I went to bed, it all began again with my mother. It was one of the most beautiful rows I ever re-

member. But perhaps you are tired of all this?"

"No; but I should like to explain it to you."

"Wait until I have finished. Then I said to uncle Marc 'There is M. d'Aubières with the unmentionable lady;' and he replied, 'You don't know what you are talking about. You are as blind as a mole; and you can't make out a thing at this distance.' Then I suggested running to find out, but he would not allow it; but the very first path we came to, he whisked me around the corner so that I could no longer see the road. And that was all for that time. A month after, I was with old Jean. I saw you again with the same lady in almost the same place, and this time" —

"I want to" —

"It's not finished yet. I said to myself, I am not like my mother and Madame de Basigny. I am not afraid of being injured; I will look close at them; so I trotted along. 'Mam'zelle Coryse,' Jean called, 'the road is getting tremendously heavy; the horses will surely break their necks; it's my opinion we'd better go back the way we came.' You can imagine I did not listen; for just at that moment you got into the ridiculous cab and

drove off on the Crisville road. I said to Jean, 'I want to know where they are going;' and he said, 'Mam'zelle, that is one of the things you must not do.'"

"And after that?"

"Afterward I lost you a corner, but I found you again at the Crisville Inn. Your horse was eating oats; and you were at the window up-stairs with the lady, and then I thought"—

"You thought?"

"If M. d'Aubières hides himself in the woods and in inns with a woman with whom he cannot be seen, it shows that he is bound to see her at any cost; and if he wishes to see her at any cost, it is because he loves her, as Paul de Lussy loved her, and even more; because for him, a colonel, to risk so much, a serious man, and an old one besides"—

Then, as the duke moved uneasily:—

"Yes, in comparison with Paul who is twenty-two, you are old, are you not? For you to do such a thing,—when Paul did it they called it folly,—it must be that you"—

"It is simply that I was terribly bored in Pont-sur-Sarthe, and sought, in no matter what world, such distraction as I had to have. I

cannot explain to you what you ought not to understand; but I can assure you that whatever you may have seen or heard about my dull existence, I am still worthy to love you and to be your husband. Never, until the day I met you, had I entertained the idea of giving either my name or my heart to any one; and I offer you, in spite of my advanced age, a love which is very fresh and very pure."

Pressing the little arm, which he had kept within his own, he murmured: "Let me hope a little, I beg of you."

"If I do not say 'yes' to you at once," said Coryse frankly, "it is because I want to marry a man I love, or whom I feel I could love, better than all others; for I detest society, and I hate frills and ruffles. Up to this time the only people I have loved have been my uncle and aunt, papa, Uncle Marc, old Jean, my nurse, Gribouille, and my flowers. I want to love my husband, if not with that love of which I am still ignorant, at least, very tenderly, very truly."

M. d'Aubières took the child's hands, and pressing them to his lips, said, "I shall be horribly wretched if I have to give you up."

He drew her to him, and she let him do so,

moved by his trembling voice, by all his tenderness, which she felt to be very real.

"Chiffon," he murmured, "my little Chiffon."

She let him hold her, while she, dreaming, was asking herself if she could not one day learn to love this man who cared so much for her, and who seemed so good. But M. d'Aubières, unable to endure the touch of the supple little form, yielding so confidently to him, unstrung by the night, by the darkness, intoxicated by the perfume exhaled by the flowers at that hour of the night, lost his head completely. With a violence that was almost brutal, he clasped Coryse in his arms, covering her brow and hair with wild kisses. With great effort, almost with horror, she freed herself; and as the duke regained his senses, and, distressed at what he had done, murmured: "Pardon me—I love you so," she replied simply, putting away the fear which in her innocence she could not explain:—

"And I, too,—I beg your pardon; but you see I cannot permit any one to kiss me."

CHAPTER IV.

"HAVE you seen Chiffon this morning?" asked M. de Bray of the marquise, as she came into the library where he and his brother were talking a few moments before breakfast.

"No ; have you?"

"I met her about nine o'clock in the rue des Benedictins," said Uncle Marc ; "she was running along as fast as she could, followed by old Jean."

The marquise was furious at this, and cried, "What! She has been out, and without permission?"

In a conciliatory manner M. de Bray suggested that she had probably gone to mass.

"To mass? She never goes except on Sunday."

Marc, who was standing in front of the window, announced: "Here she comes; she is in the yard with Luce."

"Luce" was the Baroness de Givry, first cousin of M. de Bray. She came into the library, followed by Chiffon, who, chin in air,

walked in with the utmost indifference. Without even saying "good-morning" to the young woman, the marquise demanded, in those shrill, screaming head-tones which always made Coryse half shut her eyes:—

"Where have you been?"

"At Saint Marcien," replied the girl.

"How is that, you who never go to mass?"

"I have not been to mass."

"Then, why did you go there?"

"To see the Abbé Châtel."

"What for?"

"Because I had something to say to him."

"Well, and what did he reply?" inquired Madame de Bray uneasily.

"Before telling you what he replied, I should perhaps have to tell you what I asked of him;" then laughing, she added, "that would take too long."

The marquis was speaking to Madame de Givry: "Did you meet at the Abbé Châtel's confessional?" he asked.

"No," replied the young woman, somewhat embarrassed. "The Abbé Châtel is no longer my confessor."

"Oh," said the marquis, astonished, "is it possible? You who could not move the tip of

your finger without going to ask him how you should move it, you who talked continually of him, — too much, let me say in confidence, — what can have happened to you?"

Luce de Givry, a large, tall woman of twenty-eight, brunette and bony, and lacking in every grace, had a great reputation in Pont-sur-Sarthe for her austere, narrow, and tiresome piety; but she was tolerant at the same time; that is, she never concerned herself with what those who thought and lived differently from herself did or did not do. Of a restless disposition, she tried to combine good works and society, which she loved passionately, and which, as Marc de Bray justly said, repaid her with rank ingratitude. It was not that she was disagreeable or lacking in intelligence, but she failed to please because of certain peculiarities, and more especially because of her lack of youth and charm. Women were ill at ease with her because of her severe and substantial virtues; men could not pardon her lack of grace; so that Luce was appreciated only by her family, who loved her for her fine qualities and her real goodness.

"Tell me again what you just told Pierre," said Marc, feigning surprise. Madame de

Givry obligingly repeated, "I do not confess to him any more."

"You have quarreled?"

"We have not quarreled, but he did not want me to come any more."

"How long since?" asked Chiffon, also much surprised.

"Since my ball—the ball I gave at the time of the *concours hippique*."

"What was that to him?" said Marc; "is he fool enough to meddle in such things?"

"Oh," protested Luce vivaciously, "it is not his fault, poor abbé, it is mine; I went the night before the ball to ask his permission to give it."

"What next?"

"Well, he said to me, 'My child, things of that sort are not in my province at all.'"

"He is a man of sense."

"I insisted; but he would not listen. He said, 'Do not come to me, a priest, to ask permission to give at your own home an entertainment of which the church does not approve; I ought not to encourage you.'—'But my husband wants to give a ball.'—'Well, then, give your ball, and come to tell me about it afterwards, and we will try and settle it.'—'I do

not wish to give a ball without your permission.' — 'Really, my child, you put me in a very absurd position.' "

"He was right, poor man," said Marc de Bray, laughing.

"He is a crusty old thing," said the marquis, who in the way of priests cared only for the Jesuits.

Coryse protested, angry that a word should be said against the old abbé, whom she dearly loved. "Crusty — he — not the least in the world; but don't you see that it is not his business to encourage the people of Pont-sur-Sarthe in prancing about?"

Then, turning to Mademoiselle de Givry, she said:—

"There is one thing, Luce, that I don't understand in all this affair; you don't do a thing but go to balls the whole time, so I supposed you had permission."

"And I have too — that is what I said to the Abbé Châtel: 'But you allow me to go to balls?' and he replied, 'My child, that has nothing to do with it. A ball is a place where one is more exposed to temptation than in most other places.' "

"Oh," said Chiffon thoughtfully.

““So when you give a ball, you encourage, you facilitate in a way, the commission of sin. You are, in a measure, an accomplice and responsible, while on the other hand, when you go to a ball, I permit you to go in all security, because I am sure not only that you will not sin, but that you will not be for any one else a cause of sin.’ Does that make you laugh?” said Madame de Givry, turning to Marc, who was shaking in his chair. “For my part, I was distressed. The invitations were all out; it was only two days beforehand. I came home and told Hubert and mamma that we would not give the ball, because the Abbé Châtel had refused to give me permission.”

“I suppose they persisted?” queried Coryse, who was also laughing.

“I assure you they did; mamma told me I was crazy to go and talk to the abbé about it. Hubert was furious; he said ‘Very well, we will give up the ball; but as we are no longer in mourning, and as I do not intend that we shall receive attentions without making any return, we will go nowhere,—do you understand?—absolutely nowhere. It is nothing to me; I detest society, but you?’ Of course

I was in despair ; and then God Almighty had pity upon me, and he inspired me with the idea of going to find dear Father Ragon."

"Ah !" said Coryse with a grimace.

"And Father Ragon was charming. He said to me, when I told him about the Abbé Châtel's prohibition " —

"Much good his prohibition did him at that late day," grumbled Coryse.

"Well, when I had explained why I came to consult him, he replied : 'What does the Evangelist say, my child? "that the wife owes obedience to her husband." Your husband wishes you to give a ball; God will wish it also.'"

"What an idea to mix God up in all that," protested Coryse. "I merely ask you if it is not absurd to put such things off on his shoulders?"

"I was delighted," continued Madame de Givry; "I rushed directly to the Abbé Châtel, and told him I had been and confessed to Father Ragon, and that I had permission. He said, 'Then you are satisfied with Father Ragon, my child?' And I, not daring to go on too much about Father Ragon, or to say all the good I thought of him for fear

of hurting the Abbé Châtel, merely said 'Yes,' because I did not want to tell a lie; then he said, 'Go back to him then! I shall be delighted to have you, for I have never seen any one more wearing than you at confessional.' He actually said WEARING; just fancy."

"He learned that from me!" exclaimed Coryse, laughing; "the poor abbé, he is so good and so droll."

"Do you know, Luce," counseled Marc de Bray, "you would do well not to say too much about that affair?"

"Why?" asked Madame de Givry ingenuously.

"Because you will make yourself ridiculous, and the abbé too," he added, thinking that the fear of doing an injury to her old confessor would do more toward keeping the young woman's mouth shut, than the fear of injuring herself.

The marquise exclaimed:—

"The Abbé Châtel is a man of the people; he has very little comprehension, and no delicacy, no appreciation of worldly things; so, naturally, Coryse would choose him as her confessor."

"The Abbé Châtel is not my confessor," replied Chiffon; "or, at least, he is so no longer."

"How long since, I beg of you?"

"Not for three or four years; not since I have been left to myself, and allowed to go about with Jean, since my first communion, or nearly as long as that."

"Oh," said Madame de Bray, somewhat confused to find herself so little acquainted with her daughter's actions; "yet you are always running to him. What do you go for if he is no longer your confessor?"

"He is my confidant, and I am fond of him. I think he is frank and honest, and I tell him all my little affairs; those I think ought to be told."

"Then," asked the marquise, vexed, "to whom do you confess at present?"

"To no one, or to every one, if you prefer. I go sometimes to one, and sometimes to another; to Saint Marcien, to the Cathedral, to the new Chapel, to Notre-Dame-de-Lys; I make the rounds of all the parishes; and as there are at least three vicars to a parish, I have some left over. I confess about six times a year; so they will last a long time

at that rate, and when I have finished, I can begin over again."

"The child is crazy, absolutely crazy," said the marquise sadly, "to go hither and thither, instead of choosing an intelligent director."

"*A director!* that is exactly what I don't want," declared Chiffon dryly. "I do what I think I ought to do, but in my own way. It is prescribed that you should confess; but you are not ordered to initiate into your life, and to accustom to your thoughts and your faults, a person who knows you, and who meets you outside of church. The idea is odious; this mixing of the worldly and the divine, like a salad, I find grotesque and repugnant."

"That is absurd," rejoined the marquise. "According to your idea, one would not consult a doctor if he was afraid of meeting him socially, aside from his visits."

"That has nothing to do with it."

"On the contrary, it is exactly the same thing; to one you show the soul, to the other the body; and that is worse."

"For my part, if it were absolutely necessary to show either the one or the other, I should show my body more willingly than my soul."

"Be quiet!" shrieked Madame de Bray, rising and extending her arms in one of those grand gestures to be seen in the kind of plays she affected. "Be quiet! you are a horrible creature, a girl without modesty."

"Perhaps I understand modesty in a different sense," replied Chiffon calmly.

"Keep still; I adjure you to keep still." "Adjure" having brought a mocking smile to Marc's frank face, the wrath of his step-sister was turned toward him.

"It is a fine thing for you to laugh; it becomes you so well, you who are partly responsible for Corysande's tone and manners." When, in accordance with his custom in similar cases, Marc de Bray did not reply, the marquise grew still more angry.

"Yes; it is useless for you to deny it; it is because of you that I can do nothing with the child. I know only too well that her nature is bad, but" —

"I am going to leave you to your breakfast," said Madame de Givry, in haste to depart before the scene which she foresaw. Then turning timidly to Coryse, to whom in her fear of Madame de Bray she dared not address herself directly, she added gently, "I am so sorry;

it is partly my fault ; it was I who brought up the subject of the Abbé Châtel, and that was how the rest came about."

"Bah !" said Coryse, impertinently looking at her mother, "the rest always comes ; it does not need you to bring it about."

She was about to escape by following her cousin from the room ; but the marquise called her back in tones more angry than usual.

"Remain ! I wish to speak to you."

Without a word Chiffon came back and sat down.

"I wish to know," asked Madame de Bray, "what answer we are to give to the Duke d'Aubières ?"

"None ; I will answer him myself," said Coryse quietly.

"I am your mother ; and I have the right, I think, to know what this answer is to be."

"Very well, I cannot make up my mind to marry M. d'Aubières ; and I am terribly sorry, for I am very, very fond of him."

"But this is madness. You will never have another such opportunity."

"And I reply that it would be very wrong of me to say 'yes' when my heart does not con-

sent. I have reflected seriously, and I have decided absolutely."

"Did the Abbé Châtel influence you?"

"The Abbé Châtel, to whom I explained my position, approves; but he made no suggestions. On the contrary, he advised me to wait awhile before deciding anything,—that is he did, until I told him what"—

The marquise had been lost in thought for a moment, and was not listening to what her daughter was saying. All at once one of those abrupt changes which were frequent with her came over her, and she became suddenly tender and pathetic.

"Corysande—my darling child—you are all I have in the world; you are my only love, my only joy; I have lived for you alone; since the day you were born I have had no other thought but of you."

Accustomed as Chiffon was to these lyrical crises of her mother, she always felt a vague surprise in the presence of that formidable assurance which in spite of herself disconcerted her, and at the same time impressed her as comical. She listened with parted lips and glistening eyes, her temples showing the slight pulsation which was the precursor of a wild

fit of laughter. She dropped her eyes, fearing it would burst forth if she should catch the dumfounded expression on the face of the marquis or the sinister look on her Uncle Marc's.

"You have always been deeply ungrateful, I know," continued the marquise; "and I shall not attempt to change you; I do not hope that you will do the least thing for my sake, or for any one else; but it is for your own interest that I beg you to reflect, not to decide lightly."

"I am not deciding lightly," answered Chiffon frankly.

"But you are consulting no one."

"But I have; and all those whom I have consulted have told me that in this case I have only to take counsel with myself."

The marquise clasped her hands, and said tragically:—

"For the last time, I beg of you to wait before giving any answer until you have consulted a few people of insight—Father Ragon, for example," she added indifferently.

"Stuff and nonsense," replied Coryse, half-vexed and half-laughing.

"Do you think he will discover some subtle

combination as he did in the case of Luce's ball?"

"Do you wish me to go down on my knees before you in order to" —

"No, thank you — not at all — it's not worth making so much fuss about. I will see Father Ragon whenever you wish; it's all the same to me. Only it was easier for him to settle that affair between Luce and God, than the one between M. d'Aubières and me."

"Promise me that you will go this very day to see Father Ragon."

"I promise."

"And that you will listen to his counsel?"

"I will listen; but that is not saying I will follow it."

"What did you say to him last evening?"

"To whom?"

"To M. d'Aubières."

"I told him the truth; that I liked him very much, but not enough to marry him; but that I would see — reflect" —

"And what did he say?"

"He kissed me; and I did not like it."

"That was because it was the first time, and it frightened you."

"Indeed it did not frighten me the least bit

in the world. But it produced a horrible effect upon me, that is all; and the proof that I was not frightened is, that I dared to tell him that it did have that kind of an effect."

"Oh, you told him that!"

"Poor Aubières," murmured Uncle Marc, laughing. A servant announced, "Madame la Marquise is served."

Immediately after breakfast, while Coryse was serving the coffee, Madame de Bray furtively left the library.

"Ah," said the girl, noticing her flight, "she is going to give Father Ragon his cue. It is useless; for in the first place I have a horror of him, with his crafty look and his strained smile, old beau, that he is, trying to conceal his black teeth."

"You ought not to take these violent dislikes without any reason," advised the marquis, who was always kind.

"But I have a reason."

"Indeed, what is it?"

"Because I do not esteem him."

Uncle Marc and M. de Bray began to laugh. The manner in which Chiffon announced that she did not "esteem" this very intelligent and all-powerful man, who led all the women, and

a large number of the men, in Pont-sur-Sarthe, seemed to them very comical.

The girl blushed.

"You are poking fun at me," she said; "I can see it. To use the word 'esteem' may seem ridiculous; it may be the wrong word; but, nevertheless, it is the only word I know to express what I mean."

"No, no, Chiffon," protested M de Bray; "no one is making fun of you. Come, now, that we are alone, tell us what the Abbé Châtel said to you, won't you?"

"It was I, rather, who said something to him."

"What?"

"I told him the whole affair of last evening."

"About M. d'Aubière's proposal?"

"No; about his kissing me."

"Oh, yes, yes; I did not know that you called that an 'affair.'"

"Great heavens! it was important enough to me; for at the moment that M. d'Aubières did what he did, I was on the verge of saying 'yes' — a little more and I should have done so, — then in a jiffy it all flashed in the pan."

"But why?"

"Because it was all so dreadful to me, I tell you; and when I thought that a woman is obliged to permit her husband to embrace her whenever he wishes to, I could not consent with that in prospect; no, I could not."

"And is that what you told the abbé?" asked Marc, who was highly amused.

"Why, no."

"And how did you say it?"

"I said, 'Monsieur l'abbé, M. d'Aubières has asked me to marry him, etc. At home they want me to say "yes."'"

"Allow me to contradict you," interrupted M. de Bray quickly. "I have never wished it."

"He understood that it was not you I meant when I said 'they;' he knew whom I had in mind. Then I asked what he would advise; and he replied, 'My dear little girl, since your relatives desire this marriage, it only remains for you to consult your own heart and mind; they will show you better than I what answer you ought to make.' Then I said, 'My reason says "yes" unhesitatingly, and my heart almost says so; but last night M. d'Aubières kissed me under the trees

in the garden ;' and then I tried to explain as best I could the effect it had upon me ; but the abbé cut me off short, saying. 'That will do, my child, that will do ; I do not need to to know any more.' Why are you laughing, Uncle Marc ?"

"Because you are so funny with your tales to the poor old abbé, who was never made to listen to that sort of thing."

"Quite the contrary ; that's what he's for ; and I insisted upon explaining to him the strange feeling which I had in me, at the moment when " —

"Oh, you insisted upon telling him ?"

"Yes ; I told him that I had never felt that way before, not even on the first of January when I have often had to kiss pretty disgusting people."

"And why did you tell the Abbé Châtel that you had to kiss disgusting people on the first of January ?" asked M. de Bray, astonished.

"Because it is true. First Madame de Clairville always kisses me through her moist veil, and Cousin la Balue next. Do you think he is appetizing, Cousin la Balue ? He hasn't any moist veil, but he drivels ; and it amounts to the same thing. And yet, in spite of all, I

believe I prefer them to M. d'Aubières last evening."

"You are not serious?"

"Not serious? Indeed, if you fancy that I am joking, you are greatly mistaken. I have no desire to" — Suddenly she asked, "What time is it?"

"Two o'clock."

"What, already! I must fly, for I have promised to go to see Father Ragon."

"You have lots of time; I believe he does not go to his confessional until four o'clock."

"But I'm not going to his confessional; I am going to ask to see him in his parlor. At confessional I should have to wait for ages. Four o'clock is the hour for the rabble. Good-by." With a long slide she left the library, and her clear voice was heard calling old Jean.

A serious expression came over Marc's face as he declared: —

"Whether Chiffon marries Aubière or some one else, when she is no longer with us we shall miss her sadly."

CHAPTER V.

WHEN Chiffon arrived at the house of the Jesuit it was almost three o'clock; a storm was threatening, which darkened the sky and made the air stifling.

"Stay in the garden, if you wish," she said to old Jean, who was following her into the house and looking suspiciously around. "It will be more amusing for you."

"But what if it should rain?" he suggested.

"Oh, if it rains, you will come in. What in the world makes you walk like that? One would suppose you were afraid of falling into dungeons."

"I am not exactly afraid, but I'm not quite at ease here, Mademoiselle Coryse; it seems as if the walls had ears, and that sends a cold chill over me; then, besides, these slippery floors."

"Oh, that's it, is it? Swear a little; that sometimes has a good effect."

"But I slip so; let me get on the carpet again."

"How would it be if you were to try skating?" The old servant kept slipping over the shiny floor and on the small squares of carpet, which were few and far between in the great room. Coryse pushed him out of the door, and said to him, laughing, —

"Go on, now, or you will have an accident."

As soon as he had left, Chiffon walked up and down the long room which she saw now for the first time. She was familiar only with the chapel of the fanciful new building which the Jesuits of Pont-sur-Sarthe had just erected. There she was obliged to go whenever her mother insisted upon taking her to one of their fashionable services. Madame de Bray believed with some reason that the Jesuits were people whom it was not only good to see, but with whom it was very good to be seen. All society, young men included, crowded into these services; and the galleries of the chapel had seen the beginnings of many a flirtation and many a marriage. Coryse, who was bored in the beginning at being dragged to these services which seemed like a desecration to her, ended by gradually becoming interested in the small intrigues

which went on under her eyes. She came to know all the little religious and worldly rivalries; she knew that a certain father, who was in great demand, was the object of much jealousy on the part of some of the others, who were annoyed at his success; and also that a certain elegant woman of high position had the *entrée* to the confessional at all hours, while it was open to more modest penitents only at stated times.

While waiting for Father Ragon, the most sought-after of all the worldly fathers, Chiffon compared their large, cheerful house, constructed with an English regard for comfort, hidden under a pleasing and intentional severity, with the mournful, squalid dwelling in which were crowded the curate of the cathedral and his three vicars. And she said to herself, with her childish good sense, that if the society people of Pont-sur-Sarthe were familiar with the road to the one, the poor people knew still better the road to the other. It seemed to her that the great sums of money brought here by means of legacies, gifts, and begging, were never distributed; while the meager sums, obtained with so much effort, passed straight through the

hands of the occupants of the curate's poor gray house.

Chiffon had an instinctive dislike for people who accumulated money. The word "savings," which she heard spoken with the respect which it inspires in the provinces, was hateful and repugnant to her; and she thought, that in this beautiful new house they must save much for themselves, and give very little to the poor. She noticed, as she walked up and down the parlor, the peep-holes cut in the white walls, and they reminded her of the windows in a bank; and the Jesuit fathers, who from time to time rapidly crossed the long apartment with mincing steps, seemed to her much more like clerks than religious teachers. Everything in the monastery spoke to her of the world; nothing spoke of God. After a time Coryse grew impatient. "I certainly can't wait indefinitely; it is almost five o'clock; I must go to the lecture."

She drew near the window, and saw Jean who had fallen asleep on a bench in the garden. At first he had sat up correctly, straight as in his better days, but finally he fell asleep, his legs outstretched, his body motionless, his head nodding; and the fathers who from

time to time passed by on their way to the chapel turned with surprise and some uneasiness toward the figure asleep on the bench in the sprawling attitude of a drunken man. Their silent indignation amused Coryse intensely; and she had ceased to be bored when the sound of a very sweet voice made her turn her head.

"Is that you, my child? I cannot receive you just now."

"Oh," said Chiffon, "I thought that my mother had asked you if I might come." Then stepping toward the door, she added amiably and with evident relief: —

"But if you cannot, I will go."

Father Ragon stopped her with a gesture.

"I cannot receive you here."

"I beg your pardon, it was my mother who" —

"Yes; your mother knows that I sometimes see her in the reception room; but what I can do for her, often with difficulty, I cannot do for you."

As the girl did not answer, he went on.

"Your mother has told me, my child, that you wished to consult me upon a very serious question."

"Oh, I wish — that is, she wishes" —

"Very well ; I will hear you presently at my confessional."

"But," protested Chiffon, "I did not come to confess."

"What does that signify? My penitents await me already. I cannot linger any longer."

Coryse foresaw the long wait in the new, the frightfully new, chapel, where the gold was so glaring that it swore at the crude greens of the frescoing; that chapel where the eye could not rest on anything soft and tranquil, where in the midst of the chattering and rustling, one could neither meditate nor pray; and the dread she had of waiting in this place suggested an idea which she thought perhaps might enable her to escape.

"I will wait in the chapel. It will not be tedious there, the ladies all talk so loud," she said to the priest. We must believe that Father Ragon was not anxious to admit to Chiffon's mocking ears the confidences of those whom she so irreverently spoke of as *les grenouilles de bénitier*; for suddenly he thought better of his first plan, and said, as though nothing had been agreed upon: —

"Come ; since you seem to wish it, I will

listen to you here. Then with a changed voice, and in a low, muffled tone, he said: "I will listen, my child; what have you to say to me?"

"I?" she replied with deliberation, "nothing at all; I thought that you were to tell me something."

More accustomed to defense than to attack, Father Ragon hesitated, then deciding upon his *rôle*, said: —

"Your mother has apprised me of the fact that the Duc d'Aubières has asked for your hand, and that you seem to view this demand with — I will not say repugnance" —

"Oh, you may say so; go on."

On other occasions when Chiffon had accompanied Madame de Bray, the Jesuit had merely addressed to her the ordinary words of welcome, to which she had replied in monosyllables or not at all; so her freedom of language, to which his ordinary visitors had not accustomed him, somewhat nonplussed him. A pause ensued.

"Well?" queried Coryse simply.

"Well," continued Father Ragon, decidedly disconcerted, "this offer, which would be flattering to any young girl, is for you not only

flattering, but un hoped for ; you have no fortune, while the Duc d'Aubières, although not rich, finds himself rich enough for two. In thus asking for your hand, he gives a beautiful example of disinterestedness."

"I know that, and I am very grateful to M. d'Aubières ; besides that, I like him."

"You like him ?"

"With all my heart ; I certainly like him the best of all those who come to our house."

"Then I do not understand why you" —

"You do not understand ? It seems limpid enough to me. I like M. d'Aubières as I like Madame Jarville, or the Abbé Châtel, for example. I like them for the pleasure of liking them ; but, bless your soul, I should not think of marrying them."

"My child, I see that you do not in the least comprehend what marriage is."

"I know that ; but at least I have an idea ; you can always have an idea about a thing, can't you ? Well, when I marry, I wish to love my husband in a way that is different from the way I love M. d'Aubières and the Abbé Châtel. That's all."

"Yes ; you are somewhat sentimental, like all young girls."

"I?" cried Chiffon indignantly, "not a bit of it, except perhaps in regard to the flowers, the rivers, and the sky; it is true that I love to lie on the ground and dream about them all; yes, I admit that I am sentimental about *things*, and even about animals, if you wish, but about people, — oh, fudge, no!"

Positively stunned at her manner of speaking, Father Ragon asked, a smile of amiable scorn playing about his very thin and sinuous lips, "Who brings you up, my child?" She replied, without seeming to perceive his irony,

"Just now papa and Uncle Marc; before that, my Uncle and Aunt de Launey."

As the Jesuit, in his effort to remember, repeated "De Launey?" Chiffon laughingly added: —

"Oh, you won't remember; they don't come here; they are not that sort; they are nice, quiet old people, not fashionable, not at all in the swim. They go to church in their own parish. But, pardon me, you were saying, when I interrupted you, that I was sentimental; it was because of that very thing that I cut you short."

"I was saying that young girls were all more or less in love with some ideal or other,

an ideal which they make up out of whole cloth and which they never meet, never."

"I am not in love with any ideal."

"That is fortunate ; for in that case you can consider without prejudice the beautiful future which is opening before you if you marry the Duc d'Aubières."

" ' Beautiful future ' for me who could never endure the idea of marrying a military man. I have a horror of them ; that is to say, of officers. As for the soldiers, it is not their fault, poor things ; I quite pity them, and like them because of their misfortune. I never meet one on a warm day without wanting to ask him to come into the house for a drink of something."

Father Ragon looked at Chiffon in amazement, thinking that Madame de Bray was decidedly right when she said that her daughter was not like other people. He replied with exaggerated coolness and correctness : —

"Truly, my child, you have a strange way of talking."

Quite sincerely and pretty, Coryse excused herself.

"Oh, I know I have ; that is very true ; but I simply cannot help it, it is instinctive. I

beg your pardon, I know I must shock you; I shock the Abbé Châtel; and there is the more reason that I should shock you, for you see you are a man of the world, and I am not!"

"Well," said the Jesuit, laughing in spite of himself, "are you disposed, my child, to reflect before giving up this marriage — to listen to my counsel?"

"Reflecting would do no good! In the first place, when I reflect I grow sleepy; besides, the more I should reflect, the more I should say 'no;' so there would be nothing gained in making me reflect; and as for following your advice, if you wish me to speak frankly" —

"Yes; speak quite frankly."

"Well, then, I don't exactly see why I should follow your advice. You don't know me; you have never seen me as long as this before; everything about me must displease you."

Seeing that the Jesuit made a faint gesture of protestation, she went on.

"Yes, yes, I feel it; I displease you; and there is no reason why you should be interested in me. What you say to me, you say

because my mother very foolishly asked you to."

"I say it because it is my opinion."

"That may be ; but it is your opinion because my mother has explained to you that having no fortune I have no reason to expect anything but a poor marriage, while this offer is a superb one ; and so, simply because I am not rich, you advise me to marry a man I could not love, at least not in the way I wish to love the one with whom I am to spend my life."

"My child, you are mistaken. It is because the Duc d'Aubières is an honorable man, of noble birth, and a good one besides, that I advise you to marry him. I should give you the same advice, even if you were very rich."

"Not a bit of it. In the first place, if I were very rich, instead of urging me to marry M. d'Aubières, you would keep me for" —

She paused ; and Father Ragon asked, —

"I would keep you for whom?"

"For one of your old pupils, who was reduced to beggary, or who had gambled, or something of that sort. Yes, I have always noticed how these things go in Pont-sur-Sarthe, ever since I was big enough to know anything ;

and I have rejoiced because I did not have money. You Jesuits understand how to help your own. You are not shabby in your friendships."

Fearing that she had said too much, Chiffon glanced almost timidly at the Jesuit. Contrary to her expectations, his fine face, always serious and distinguished, had a softened expression. Looking with a certain kindliness at the child, he said: "It seems to me that from what I know of you, these people who are not 'shabby in their friendships,' as you say, ought to please you. You ought to like those who are ready to help others."

"Yes, if it is one individual; no, if it is a number of them."

Father Ragon was astonished, and looked at Chiffon without saying a word. This sixteen-year-old girl was the first thinking being he had met since he had been in Pont-sur-Sarthe. Seeing that the child, taking his silence as a dismissal, rose to go, he asked: —

"Are you much of a reader?"

"No, not much."

"Have you thought a good deal about serious things?"

"Sometimes, on horseback. Yes, espec-

ally when I ride I think about things ; for then I can't go to sleep, and I reflect then ; but it's not intentional."

"And the result of your reflections is that you do not like our order?"

"That is it ; it does not seem like an order, a religious order, to me. Dominicans, Maristes ; Capucins, and so forth, — I call those orders ; they concern themselves with God ; they preach ; they do what one expects of holy men ; while you seem like some other kind of an association. You concern yourselves with marriages, with politics, with a little of everything, so that I am afraid of you ; and God knows, I am not afraid of many things !"

"I assure you, my child, that we work for the good, for the salvation, of humanity."

"For good upon this earth, I am convinced. But for salvation ? I don't believe that interests you much. Moreover, with you, humanity means only fashionable people, as it does with my mother. I am sure of that."

"I see that you are decidedly opposed to us. You are wrong, my dear child."

"No more opposed to you than to the Freemasons, for example ; but I dislike all those

who group themselves together to oppress those who stand alone."

"This hatred may lead you a long way."

"A very long way. For instance, when as little child I went with my nurse to make purchases and heard the poor little shopkeepers on the side streets complaining, almost crying, as they told how they could no longer do business since the larger shops in the *Rue des Benedictins* and in the *Place Carnot* had opened. When I saw these old-time shops close, one by one, when I heard that this one and that one had failed, I was dead against all those enormous shops which swallowed up the smaller ones; and often at night when I have said my prayers I have cried to God with all my strength, that it would be a fine idea if he would sweep them all away in the night."

"It was an abominable thought."

"Possibly — I don't defend it — but I had it. You don't suppose I told that to Uncle Albert and Aunt Mathilde, do you? It would never have done. Oh, no; I never told my ideas to any one in those days."

"Nor in these, I hope?"

"Oh, yes; now I tell all such things to the Abbé Châtel or to Uncle Marc."

"Oh, surely," replied the Jesuit with a strained smile. "M. le Vicomte de Bray is a socialist; or, at any rate, he stood for them at the last election."

"No," said Chiffon brusquely, for she allowed no reflections upon Uncle Marc, "you are mistaken; M. de Bray, who really is what you call a socialist, made no use of that fact to aid him in the election. He ran on an independent ticket."

"And he failed."

It was the candidate of the Jesuit fathers who succeeded.

Provoked, Chiffon replied:—

"Yes, it took too much money to win." Then rising, without waiting for the signal of the Jesuit, who had quite forgotten himself in listening to this droll little specimen of modernity, so different from anything he had known up to that time, she added, somewhat sarcastically, "But I ought not to detain you any longer; you were in a great hurry; and there are all of those ladies who must be in the chapel stamping their feet with impatience."

Father Ragon rose also; and as Coryse retired to allow him to go out before her, he said with a courteous smile,—

"No; you are no longer a little girl; and you will, perhaps, soon be Madame la Duchesse."

"That would surprise me," replied Chiffon, shaking her flying locks, which fell in waves below her waist.

"I see no one waiting outside," said Father Ragon. "You did not come alone, did you?"

"Oh, no, I have not been brought up in the American fashion at all,—I have my nurse." And pointing to old Jean, who, still asleep on the bench, had slipped almost to the ground, she said: "He is not a decorative object—my nurse."

When Chiffon was once more outside, she turned to look at the big chapel-clock, and murmured with a smile:—

"Half-past five. It is I who have kept them waiting, those *grenouilles de bénitier*."

CHAPTER VI.

THEY were at dinner when Madame de Bray entered the dining-room. They had long since given up waiting for her; she seldom arrived punctually; she gave as excuses, the races, calls, clocks that were behind time, and, in extremity, accidents to her carriage. As soon as she was seated, she said to Coryse in an unusually amiable manner:—

“Well, were you pleased with Father Ragon?”

“Oh, very well pleased,” replied the child carelessly; adding, after a moment’s reflection, “but I do not know whether he was pleased with me.”

“What did you say to him?” questioned M. de Bray, with vague uneasiness.

“Oh, a lot of things; the conversation turned upon”—

“I shall go and see him to-morrow morning,” interrupted the marquise less amicably, “and he will tell me what occurred.”

“But I can tell you just as well,” observed

Chiffon calmly, "for in the first place nothing at all happened."

"Ah, that is surprising."

"And why is it surprising?"

"Because you seem to be embarrassed."

"I? not at all; why should I be embarrassed?"

"I don't know."

"Neither do I; you wanted me to go and talk with Father Ragon. I went; we talked; and that's all."

"And there was nothing disagreeable?"

"No; he is well-bred, almost too well-bred, and so am I, not too much so, but sufficiently. I thought that he did not approve of anything I said to him, and I am sure that nothing that he said convinced me; so we are just where we were before."

"Then," said Madame de Bray, taking advantage of the absence of the servant from the room, "you have not yet decided to accept Duc d'Aubières?"

"I have decided *not* to marry him."

Turning to Uncle Marc, she added:—

"I will give him his answer this evening. You told me he was coming."

"No!" cried the marquise, exasperated;

"you shall not give him his answer this evening; it is madness to refuse him thus, without reflection."

"But I have reflected! I haven't done anything but reflect since yesterday. I reflected until I thought I'd die."

"But you will wait before giving the duke a definite answer?"

"Wait for what? No; I don't wish to make him dance attendance any longer; it has lasted too long already."

"I forbid you to speak to him to-day," said the marquise imperatively, as she rose. Then, seeing that Chiffon was going up-stairs instead of into the drawing-room, she asked: —
"Where are you going?"

"To my room."

"You will remain here."

The child reddened, and replied distinctly: "It's all the same to me; but if I stay I shall speak to M. d'Aubières as I ought to. I shall tell him that I have decided that I can never marry him — never!"

"You are crazy."

"You have often told me that."

"Here he comes," cried the marquise suddenly, calling their attention with a gesture to the sound of the bell.

"So much the better!" cried Chiffon. "I long to get this weight off my heart."

She went straight up to the colonel, without the least embarrassment, as he entered, and said : —

“M. d’Aubières, I should like to speak to you. Will you come with me into the garden where we were last evening?”

As they went down the steps, she added with a smile and in an undertone:—

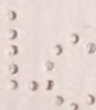
"But you are not to kiss me."

He followed her obediently, deeply moved. Divining what she was about to say to him, before she had spoken, he questioned pathetically:—

"It is to tell me you do not want me, is it not?"

“Yes,” murmured Chiffon, troubled at the sorrow she was causing; “I have thought a very great deal since last evening, and I have decided that I cannot marry you; but at the same time I am very fond of you. I like you with all my heart. It makes me miserable to say all these things to you; but it is better to say them before than after, isn’t it?”

He said nothing. She could not see him



in the darkness; but she felt that he was unhappy, and was saddened by it.

"I beg of you," she implored, putting her hand gently on his arm; "you mustn't mind. I am not worth it. In the first place, I am high-tempered, ignorant, not well brought up; and then I could not be the wife of a colonel, there is nothing worldly about me; I shall never know how to talk, or to receive, or to be nice to the people I don't like, or to persuade stupid people that I find them clever. I have not the womanly qualities. I am a savage, made to live alone with the flowers and the animals. Suddenly changing her tone, she exclaimed:—

"Speaking of animals, where is Gribouille? I have not seen him since breakfast. What if he should be lost?"

And she flew away, running across the lawn in the direction of the stable. After a moment she returned, followed by Gribouille, who was jumping about her.

"Pardon me," she said, quite out of breath, "but I am so frightened about Gribouille. I ought not to have done it in the midst of a serious conversation; but it is just like me."

As the duke made no reply, she asked, trying to penetrate the obscurity:—

“Are you no longer there?”

“Yes,” he murmured hoarsely; “I am still here.”

He was sitting near the walk on a little mound. Chiffon went up to him, realizing that he could scarcely speak for the tears which choked him.

“What!” she said, deeply moved; “what, you are crying?”

The thought had never occurred to her that this man, who seemed to her a giant, could be so affected. She sat down near him, surprised and distressed.

“*Mon Dieu!*” she said, ready to cry herself. “*Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!*”

She could find nothing else to say; she felt that she was horribly wicked and stupid for tormenting this very good friend of hers; for deliberately causing him such sorrow. The idea that any one could suffer for her, or because of her, was odious to Coryse. She preferred a thousand times to suffer herself. Suddenly she said to herself, “I am going to tell him what I have on my mind; then, afterwards, if he wants me just the same, I will marry him.”

"Listen to me," she said, in the ringing tones which moved the duke so profoundly. "Listen to me, and understand me if you can. I will do my best to make you; but it may not, perhaps, be very clear, for it is very difficult to say; and if we were in the sunshine, if I could see you, and you could see me, I should never dare — never! But first, I beg of you, do not weep; it is horrible to me!"

Then, as he made no reply, she kneeled before him with an abrupt movement, put her arms about his neck, and, kissing his poor, wet cheek affectionately, she said, with a voice of infinite supplication: —

"Please don't; and I promise you that I will do everything you wish — everything."

Pure and tender, and entirely forgetful of the night before, she clung to him. He repulsed her almost sternly.

"No! no! do not touch me."

Astonished at first, Chiffon arose, murmuring sadly: —

"Ah, yes! I see you are doing as I did yesterday."

Then timidly she sat down again near the duke without speaking. Trembling slightly, he went on: —

"No! do not think that, dear little Coryse; it is because — you cannot understand — I am nervous — unfortunate — I hardly know what I am doing, or what I am saying — I had dreamed such a beautiful dream, and I have fallen from such a height."

Somewhat disturbed, she said: —

"If you have dreamed what you call such a beautiful dream, at least it is not my fault, is it? That is to say, I have not allowed you to believe that I had any desire to marry you, I have not tried to make you care for me except as a good comrade."

"No, certainly not."

"For if I had done that, even without meaning to, I should be in despair; for I think that to flirt with men, to make eyes at them and all that, in order to make them think that they please you, or that you desire to please them, when you don't care at all about them, is abominable, yes, abominable! It is what I see done around me all the time, and what I myself should never do."

"You were saying just now," said the duke, recovering himself gradually, "that you were going to explain to me why you did not wish to be my wife."

“Yes; but I am afraid to explain it to you. I do not know very much about life except what I can guess, and that is not much; but I sometimes overhear conversations, whisperings, and when there are parties at home I see a good deal of flirting. I don't mean among young girls; young girls can do as they choose, can't they, without any impropriety, since they are not married? But I mean among married women. There are married women who deceive their husbands. I don't know exactly how such things begin and how they end; but they seem to me very bad.”

“Without doubt, they are bad.”

“Well, I am sure that if I should marry you I should deceive you.”

“But,” stammered M. d'Aubières in astonishment, “why are you so sure of that?”

“I am sure, as sure as one can be of those things, because, you see, up to the present time, I have never met any one in regard to whom I could say to myself, ‘There is a man I should be glad to marry.’ And if after we were married I should one day say to myself in meeting some man or other, ‘there, I should like to have married that man,’ imagine what a blow it would be! How disastrous!”

In spite of his sorrow, the duke felt like laughing; but he replied in all seriousness:—

“The sort of thing you describe has happened to many women, who, instead of permitting themselves to think about the newcomer, have depended all the more on their husbands; and if they were good husbands, as I shall be” —

“I am sure of that,” said Chiffon with conviction; “but do you think it is enough to be a good husband, if one has not a good wife?”

“And why would you not be a good wife, honest and true?”

“I should be — if I did not meet” —

“Whom?”

“The person whom perhaps I might never meet, but who certainly is not you.”

Then, as M. d'Aubières moved uneasily, she added:—

“Yes, I am very fond of you, I have told you that; but I do not love you at all, not at all, as one ought to love one's husband; and I am positive that if the day should ever come when I should meet the one whom I could love like that, I should simply let myself go. But it is torture for me to tell you all this; however, it would be still more so to marry you without

telling you. If, after you know what it is that keeps me from saying 'yes,' you still want me just the same, you have been warned, you would have nothing to reproach me with, and I, at least, shall not have been underhanded or deceitful."

"I understand," said M. d'Aubières softly, "that you would be very unhappy with me, and that I should be horribly unhappy to see you unhappy. I must give up what has been my only joy during the six months that I have been thinking constantly about it. You have very delicately and very picturesquely made me understand that I am an old fool."

"You are angry with me," said Coryse. "I am sure that you are angry with me."

"No! I swear to you that I am not," muttered the poor man, choked with emotion. He tried to rise, but seemed to be sinking into the earth.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed, surprised to feel that with each movement the earth seemed to give away beneath him. Gribouille, seeing him move, understood that they were about to go, and began to dance in front of them, barking furiously. The duke tried to support himself with his hand; but it pene-

trated the soft earth, while his body seemed to sink deeper and deeper.

"I do not know where I am!" he said to Chiffon, who was standing in the driveway waiting for him. "It seems to me I am sitting in a hole; and the more I try to get up the more I can't."

She extended her hands, and he lifted himself with an effort; but as she approached, she, too, felt the earth give way.

"What can it be?" she said, herself treading on the spot which M. d'Aubières had just left. Then she exclaimed with a laugh: —

"Ah! it is the cemetery for the flowers; you were sitting on it, and as I just buried some this morning, it is all damp."

"The cemetery for the flowers?"

"Yes, for the flowers; do not speak of it at the house; they would make fun of me. I know very well it is stupid; but I love the flowers so dearly that I cannot bear to see them decay when they are dead."

It was true that since her earliest childhood Chiffon had had a cemetery where she buried her faded flowers. It was impossible for her to see them thrown into the street or upon brush heaps; the idea that a flower should

touch anything that was not clean, that it should be trampled under foot, dragged along by dress-skirts, or swept up in the dust, was unbearable to her. In winter she burned them in the big fireplace in her room; but in summer, deprived of this resource, she buried them conscientiously and secretly in the back of the garden, fearing her mother's scoldings and the ridicule of Uncle Marc.

"You will not tell, will you?" she repeated; "with the exception of Gribouille, no one knows it, no one; and it makes me furious to have them make fun of me, and for this thing especially; for I should feel that they were right; I know it is absurd."

"You may be sure, Mademoiselle Coryse, that I will never speak to any one of the cemetery of the flowers; poor little cemetery," he added sadly, "I who can scarcely be compared to a flower, I, too, have been buried here this evening; yes, quite buried."

"Come, come," said Coryse, "you are not going over all that again."

"No! but will you let me go out by the little wicket gate; I prefer not to go back to the house with my eyes as big as my fist. I shall be ridiculous; besides, I am coming to see Marc to-morrow morning."

"You are fond of Uncle Marc?"

"Very; he was one of my childhood friends."

"Are you the same age?"

"He is three years younger than I."

"It amounts to the same thing," she said.

"The same thing; yes, you are right."

But as he kissed for the last time Chiffon's firm and supple little hand, M. d'Aubières thought:—

"No, it is not quite the same thing; it is three years less."

When she returned to the drawing-room, the girl looked at Uncle Marc who was reading near a lamp, as though she saw him for the first time; then, instead of answering M. and Madame de Bray's anxious inquiries upon the disappearance of the duke, she thought:—

"Uncle Marc looks not three, but ten years younger, at least."

CHAPTER VII.

THE next morning Chiffon was lying on the lawn playing with Gribouille and waiting for her lesson hour, when Uncle Marc, coming up to her, said in a vexed tone : —

“Aubières has gone !”

She was startled.

“What ! gone ? Gone where ?”

“To Paris, to recuperate a little ; he has need of it, poor fellow.”

“Oh,” said the child, “you frightened me ; I thought he had gone forever.”

“Would that have grieved you ?”

“I should think it would.”

“Aubières’s sorrow touched me ; but now that it is all over, Chiffon, I want to tell you that I think you did right.”

“I am glad of that. And papa ?”

“And papa also.”

“Then all is for the best. Are you going to ride this morning ?”

“No ; I have letters to write ; I have not told you, I have great news to announce. My Aunt Crisville is dead.”

"Indeed," she said indifferently; "she is not my aunt, and I did not know her. You have hardly seen her, for that matter, since she has been living in the South."

"I have not seen her often; but I was her godson, and I have just learned that she has left me all her fortune."

"All her fortune!" exclaimed Coryse; "why, she was the one they called Aunt Carabas; she is so very, very rich."

"She *was* so very rich, poor woman."

Chiffon threw her arms around uncle Marc's neck, while Gribouille, mistaking her movement, leaped upon him.

"Oh! how glad I am. I am so glad it is you. It will suit you so well to have a lot of money."

"Let me alone, you strangle me," said Marc de Bray brusquely, making an effort to free himself; "I have told you a hundred times that you are too large to hang about my neck like a baby."

"Pardon me, I always forget. What are you going to do with all that money?"

"To begin with, I shall travel."

"Oh," murmured the child, suddenly affected, "are you going away, you too?" and

resting her head against uncle Marc's shoulder, she began to cry softly. Then she said in a voice that was scarcely intelligible:—

“Forgive me, but I am unnerved. I don't know what is the matter with me. Just now it was M. d'Aubières who was fond of me, and went away, and now it is you.”

Her tears increased, and she added:—

“You see, there are none too many of them,—of people who love me.”

“But, Chiffon, I am not going never to return; do not be uneasy. I am not going to make a tour of the world. France will suffice me. Besides, I have the spleen.”

“Why do you say ‘spleen’ instead of homesickness? You need not be ashamed to call it that. I hate to hear you speak English.”

“I see with pleasure that you are feeling better, Chiffon. Scold me as much as you wish, only laugh; that is all I desire.”

“You will now be able to go on with politics. This is money that arrives betimes; there is yet a month before the election; you have time to defeat the Jesuit's pupil, who lies to the workmen, who lies to the world, who lies all the time. Yes, you will defeat him; that is one thing that will give me pleasure.”

"Will it be on account of interest in me, or antipathy for my rival?" Marc asked with a laugh.

"Both. As for charity, I think you will do a great deal of that, you, who gave such heaps when you were not rich."

"How do you know?"

"I know your poor people; and when I go to visit them, they talk to me of you all the time. That's why I go to see them. Otherwise I might as well choose those who did not know you."

"How does it happen if they speak to you of me, that they never speak to me of you?"

"Because I forbid it. I say to them, 'If he knows that I come here, that there was danger of his meeting me here, you would never see him again, never, because he hides his gifts, as another would his thefts.' That is true, isn't it?"

"What a droll child you are; if your mother knew" —

"Ah, *à propos*, does she know of your inheritance?"

"Yes."

Chiffon began to laugh.

"Her nose will be out of joint; for while

she has always pretended to believe that Aunt Carabas would leave her fortune to charity, she had hoped in her inmost soul that you and papa would get it. Now that only half of what she hoped for has come true, and that not the best half, she will be in such a state of mind !”

Then, returning to the subject which interested her most, she asked sorrowfully : —

“Are you going away at once, tell me ?”

“For a few days, on business ; but I shall return soon.”

“Yes, do ; you have barely time for the elections ; I shall be your propagandist. Poor Jean, how he will have to go about on foot and on horseback.”

Then seeing the count laugh, she went on, —

“You are wrong if you are making fun of my propaganda. I am very popular, even if it does not seem so. How I shall rejoice over all those people who do not like you, and there are a great many of them in Pont-sur-Sarthe. I don't know how it is in Paris, for during the three months that we were there, I did not know what you were doing, or whether you were liked or not ; while here it is different ; I know all that is going on.”

"And what have you discovered?"

"With the exception of a few friends, everybody detests you."

"There is no reason why they should."

"Yes! it is your own fault. You live alone; and in Pont-sur-Sarthe they do not pardon that; nor do they elsewhere, for that matter."

"But I do not live alone."

"Yes, you do; you scorn visits, dinners, clubs, balls, mass, garden-parties, Madame De Bassigny's Tuesdays; you scorn everything that bores you, and I don't blame you for it; only you must not think that is the way to make yourself popular."

"Yes, I am a bear; it is all wrong."

"Why wrong? what does it matter to you? Because now, whatever you do, you will be adored. They will want to marry you. Tell me, your inheritance is not a secret, is it?"

"No! I shall not cry it from the house-tops; but I shall not be sorry to have it known."

"That is strange," said Chiffon, surprised; "you are always so indifferent to the effect you produce. Why do you wish to have it known that you have become rich?"

"Simply because I do not wish to have it

said, when it is known that I am spending a great deal of money for my election, that I am supported by any committee whatever. Going into politics in that way is distasteful to me; I consider it contaminating."

"I hardly know what committee would support you, anyway, because you have your own ideas, and are attached to no party."

"That is true; but they would accuse me of it just the same."

"I suppose that would be just as bad," said Coryse with a queer look in her eyes. "I am going off to amuse myself this morning. What time is it?"

Uncle Marc looked at his watch:—

"It is quarter of nine."

"Then I have time if I hurry." With all her strength she called, "Jean!"

The old coachman appeared at the door of the stable, whither he always returned from force of habit, as soon as his little mistress had no further use for him.

"Be quick and dress yourself; we are going out at once—we must hurry—I want to be at the Place des Girondins in ten minutes."

Coryse called out to one of the maids, "Has Madame la Marquise gone out?"

"No, Mademoiselle."

"Then it's all right," murmured the child. "I was afraid she would be there before me."

Throwing a kiss to Uncle Marc, she disappeared, laughing.

A quarter of an hour later Chiffon rang at the Jesuits' gate.

"Is this the hour when Father Ragon says mass?" she asked of the man who acted as doorkeeper.

"Yes; but it is about over, it is almost nine o'clock."

Instead of entering the chapel, Coryse remained in the garden. She walked to and fro, a graceful figure in her blouse of pale pink batiste, her bright face framed in a big leghorn hat covered with roses. With her eyes on the door of the little church, she thought joyfully:—

"He will go first to the sacristy; but as there is no other exit, he must come this way. I cannot miss him. In the meantime the ladies will all arrive and I shall announce my news to several. How amusing it will be"—

The door of the chapel closing with a heavy sound made Coryse turn her head, and she

saw little Barfleur who was coming from mass. He had on a blue waistcoat, very short and tight, and trousers with large parti-colored checks. His enormous necktie came up so high in the back that it almost completely concealed the collar of his shirt. In this costume he looked to Chiffon more sickly and stunted than ever, — at the same time he was not bad looking, but was rather distinguished in spite of his slender form, and his pronounced manner of dressing. The child was walking toward him, ready to say ‘Good-morning;’ but when he saw that she was alone he bowed with extreme correctness without stopping, and taking a position about fifty feet away, seemed also to be waiting for the close of mass.

“He is looking for Madame Delorme,” thought Chiffon, who had guessed for a long time that Madame Delorme, the very pretty wife of a notary in Pont-sur-Sarthe, found little Barfleur very much to her taste. Shortly afterwards Madame Delorme appeared, and the young man approached her with a look of surprise, as though he had no idea of meeting her there.

“Mass cannot be over,” thought Chiffon;

“they have come out ahead of the others in order to have a chance to talk.”

Seeing this pretty woman leaning over to look at the poor ungainly creature, who came barely to her shoulder, she thought:—

“How strange it is! M. Delorme is a hundred times nicer. What can she see in little Barfleur? He has neither intelligence nor charm; he is a miser and a blockhead. It can only be the prestige of pedigree; for whatever one may say, that still counts, even with those who pretend to despise it. There is Madame Delorme leaving first; he will join her outside, and they will have another little chat in the courtyard or in the park, as if by chance.”

She followed with her eyes the fine retreating figure of the young woman with her small waist and her large hips, and said to herself:—

“It must be pleasant to be pretty; I should like to be pretty myself.”

Madame de Bray had so often told Coryse that she was ugly and ungrateful that the child sincerely believed it.

A murmur of voices interrupted her reflections; Madame de Bassigny was coming out

of the chapel accompanied by the two or three women who usually made a little court about her.

"Aha," thought Coryse, "here is my chance to spread the news."

She stepped slowly toward the group with bowed head, completely absorbed, apparently, in the contemplation of a little pebble which she was rolling along by pushing it with the toe of her boot.

"Ah! here is Mademoiselle Chiffon!" cried Madame de Bassigny. "How are you, my dear?"

"Very well, Madame," replied Coryse, who saw at once they were watching her closely. She was exciting a good deal of curiosity at this time. The story of the offer she had had, and of her refusal, and of M. d'Aubières's departure, was already in every one's mouth. Some one had met him at eight o'clock in the morning in a cab, with a trunk; this Madame de Bassigny had discussed with her companions on her way to mass, expressing great astonishment that this penniless girl should refuse a duke with an income of twenty-five thousand livres. They were jealous of the poor little thing; and were irritated, not only

because of the offer she had had, but because of her refusal.

"How shall I let them know of Uncle Marc's inheritance?" repeated Chiffon to herself. "It is not easy; it must appear to come about naturally."

"I am doubly pleased to meet you, Mademoiselle Coryse," said Madame de Bassigny amiably, "for I will beg you to give to your mother an invitation which I was going to address to her when I return home. I want her to dine with us a week from Thursday, with you and M. de Bray, and also M. Marc, if he will consent; though I scarcely dare to hope he will do us that honor."

Chiffon seized the chance which offered, and looking intently at Madame de Bassigny in order to follow every change in her expression, she answered:—

"My uncle scarcely ever dines out; but in any case he cannot be with you on Thursday, because he is going away."

"With the Duc d'Aubières?" questioned the colonel's wife maliciously.

Chiffon did not appear to understand, and answered calmly:—

"No, quite alone; his Aunt de Crisville is dead."

"Oh, she died at Pau, I suppose?" interrupted Madame de Bassigny; and turning toward one of the ladies who was with her, she said:—

"You were thinking of buying a château; Crisville will certainly be for sale; the elevation is too high for a hospital or an orphanage."

Everybody in Pont-sur-Sarthe firmly believed that Madame Crisville would leave her fortune for charitable purposes.

"Oh, no," said Chiffon innocently; "I do not think my uncle will sell Crisville; on the contrary, I think he will live there; he inherits everything, you know."

"He! What! M. de Bray?" gasped Madame de Bassigny dumfounded. "But your aunt must have left five or six millions."

"She is not my aunt; and she leaves more than that," asserted Chiffon with assurance; although she was in total ignorance of the amount of the fortune.

"More than that?" repeated Madame de Bassigny, astounded and annoyed.

People were beginning to come out of the chapel. She bade farewell to Coryse, and advanced to meet the crowd, anxious to

spread the news. From a distance Chiffon saw with delight the look of consternation on the faces of those to whom Madame de Bassigny was speaking.

"They are thunderstruck," she thought. "I am glad I came." Suddenly she bounded toward the chapel. She had just seen Father Ragon, who was walking along at an even gait.

"I mustn't let him get hold of it." She walked rapidly up to him, and asked politely:—

"Will you permit me to say a few words to you?"

Then, as the Jesuit cast an uneasy glance at the others who were waiting for him, she said:—

"Oh, it will not take long. Yesterday I chattered too much."

"Oh, no, my child; on the contrary, you surprised and interested me."

"You are very kind; but I know I did wrong to speak of my uncle and his politics; and I am here to-day to ask you not to mention this to my mother, who is coming to see you."

"I assure you," said Father Ragon dryly,

"that you exaggerate the importance of your conversation."

"Not so; for I gave you to understand that my uncle would not run this time against M. de Bernay because he had no money; but now he is going to run because he has got some."

"Ah," said the Jesuit warily; then, forgetting the precepts of discretion and prudence which usually guided his least actions, he asked pointedly:—

"And how did he get it?"

"Because he is the sole legatee of his Aunt de Crisville, who died yesterday."

Father Ragon stood with half-open mouth in utter astonishment.

Old Madame de Crisville was one of his congregation before she was obliged by ill-health to live in Pau; and he had arranged for her, down to the minutest details, a disposition of her property by which the Jesuits had not been forgotten. And now this old lady had died, far from his influence, neglecting to keep the promises obtained from her with so much difficulty, and leaving her fortune to whom? To an out-and-out socialist, already pretty well off; to a dangerous man,

whom she was all unconsciously arming for the struggle against everything she ought to have respected and upheld.

At length he inquired, speaking rather to himself than to Chiffon:—

“Is it an enormous fortune?”

“Enormous,” repeated the child.

With rapid intuition the Jesuit had an idea that possibly Coryse was making fun of him; but as he glanced toward her he saw her smiling at his side, and looking so simple and indifferent, that he was reassured. Suddenly the thought came to him that this Chiffon, upon whom up to this time not the least attention had been bestowed, was about to become a real heiress.

The affection of the Vicomte de Bray for his brother's step-daughter was well known in Pont-sur-Sarthe. It was known that he loved Coryse d'Avèsnès, not only as a niece, but as his own child. Taking the paternal tone, Father Ragon said to Coryse:—

“I am delighted at the good fortune God has sent you; for I see the hand of God in this. Yesterday through an excess of delicacy, on account of a scruple, a fear of not being a sufficiently good wife, you repulsed the Duc

d'Aubières, who had asked for your hand, and was willing to accept you without fortune ; and to-day God rewards this conduct by placing you in a position where you can choose according to your own heart."

"But," said Chiffon, not guessing what the Jesuit was driving at, "I cannot see why I am enabled to choose according to my own heart, merely because my uncle inherits a fortune, even admitting that my heart has a desire to choose."

"It is quite clear, nevertheless," murmured Father Ragon, "that the Vicomte de Bray will give a fine dot to the child whom he regards almost as his own. He is an old bachelor, without near relatives."

She began to laugh. "Ah! that is it ; you think that all of a sudden I have become a desirable match. I had already been thinking that M. d'Aubières' offer had given me a higher value. Since it occurred, I notice that people look at me with respectful curiosity. How will it be now? Honor, money, everything for me! I shall be quite changed."

While she was speaking, the Jesuit, observing little Barfleur, who was still standing under the trees, exchanged with him an affectionate sign of recognition.

"That is Hugh de Barfleur," he said, pointing out the young man to Chiffon; "one of my old pupils."

She answered without enthusiasm:—

"I know; I am acquainted with him."

"He is one of the faithful," continued Father Ragon. "He attends mass here every day; he has a beautiful soul; he does only what will be pleasing to God."

"I don't know," exclaimed the child, almost in spite of herself; "I wonder if it is as pleasing to God as you seem to think, for M. de Barfleur to come here to flirt with Madame Delorme."

The Jesuit made a gesture of sincere surprise and indignant protestation. He had suspected nothing, but this unseemly remark shed a new light upon a thousand details hitherto unnoticed. Anxious to ward off suspicion, and also to serve his old pupil, he replied in the most insinuating manner:—

"Not only are such remarks out of place from the mouth of a young girl, but you are lacking in perspicuity, my child. Hugh de Barfleur cannot be interested in the person you mention, not only because his principles protect him from that sort of temptation, but

also because I have every reason to believe that he is interested elsewhere."

"Indeed!" said Coryse absent-mindedly.

"Yes; the poor fellow is quite smitten. I believe he is in love with a young girl, who up to this time has not paid the least attention to him."

"A young girl?" queried Chiffon, astonished, and trying to think who it could be. "A young girl? I never heard anything about it."

Then with a sudden illumination she burst out laughing, and said:—

"With me, perhaps, lucky girl!" Then looking at the Jesuit with admiration, she said, "One can see that you are losing no time."

Father Ragon glanced at her with a smile on his lips, but with a hard look in his eye.

She excused herself, saying:—

"I beg your pardon for laughing, but it is so funny. According to your plan, the money which will be a detriment to M. de Bernay would at least benefit M. de Barfleur, and would still be kept in the hands of the Jesuits."

"Mademoiselle d'Avèsnès," said the Jesuit, in a cutting tone, "your mother is right when

she says that you are not a well-bred young girl."

"Right to think so, possibly, but not to say so," said Chiffon gently, with a bow to the father as he left her. She looked about for old Jean, and discovered him motionless upon a bench. Mechanically she pursed up her lips, but stopped herself, thinking:—

"Oh, *Mon Dieu!* I almost whistled as I sometimes do at home. What an effect that would have produced."

When she left the Jesuit's she began to run, forgetting the servant who was hobbling painfully behind her; she wanted to tell the good news to the Abbé Châtel, sure that he would take real pleasure in it. At the corner of the Place du Palais, a flower vender was stationed. Chiffon took some roses, and ran with them all the way to Saint Marcien.

If the parsonage of the cathedral was not magnificent, that of Saint Marcien was pitiful, a little hovel next to the old Basilica in a dark, dirty alley. At the left of the hovel was a small garden, not at all one's idea of a curate's garden. The Abbé Châtel, who adored flowers, had transformed

the poor little spot into a fragrant mass of bloom.

The servant had gone to market, and the abbé himself opened the door for Coryse. He held in one hand a preserve pot filled for the moment with paste, and in the other an enormous brush which had lost most of its bristles.

"I beg your pardon for receiving you in this way," he explained to Chiffon, who bade him a joyous "Good-morning," "but I was pasting the parlor paper;" and he showed her the narrow strips, which, loosened by the moisture, hung all along the wall. The room was sparsely furnished with six cane chairs, an easy-chair with a broken seat, a fine old clock of rare and elegant design, and a statue of the Virgin in alabaster, which hung on the wall above a pedestal, upon which stood a vase.

"I have brought you some roses for your Virgin," said Chiffon, putting the flowers in the vase; "but they must have some water immediately."

"Yes; in a moment."

"No, now; in this heat it would be cruel to make them wait; and it cannot be the wish of

the Virgin that anything should suffer for her sake."

"True," said the priest amiably; and went to fill the vase at a little pump in the garden.

As she watched him, Coryse said to herself:—

"He is not nice to look at. With that ruddy, kindly face under his white hair, he looks like a tomato in cotton; but I like him as he is, because he is so good. He busies himself with the poor and with his God. He ignores scandal, intrigues, flirtations, and all other worldly things."

When the abbé returned, she cried gayly:—

"Monsieur l'Abbé, I am perfectly happy."

"Then there is a change since yesterday," he said, very much pleased. He had picked up the roses, and with his big, awkward hands was arranging them with infinite care. When this was done, he came and sat down opposite Coryse.

"Monsieur l'Abbé, Uncle Marc has suddenly become very rich."

"How is that, my child?"

"He has not robbed a coach; don't imagine such a thing. He has fallen heir to Madame de Crisville's fortune."

"She is dead, then?"

"Naturally, Monsieur l'Abbé."

"Oh! the poor woman; she was so generous, so good to the unfortunate."

"Uncle Marc will be as good as she was; you will see how much we shall all get for our poor people."

"God grant that it may be so, my child."

"But," she said, not quite pleased, "one would think that you doubted it."

"I do not doubt it exactly, no; but it would not be surprising if M. Marc were less interested than his aunt in religious matters; he is young."

"Young!" exclaimed Chiffon, astonished.

"Uncle Marc young?"

"Why, certainly; he is not old."

"I don't say that he has one foot in the grave; but neither is he young, for he is only three years younger than M. d'Aubières, and he is quite old. He left this morning," she added, with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Left?"

"Yes; but not for always; he is coming back. But never mind, Monsieur l'Abbé, if I had known that you wouldn't have been any more enthusiastic than this, I should not have

dragged my poor Jean here in such a heat. I should have left you to learn the news with the rest of the world."

"But, my child, you do not understand; I am delighted at the good fortune which has come to your uncle, and also at the pleasure it gives you."

"That is better; but I must go — it is almost noon."

As Chiffon went home in the broiling sun, the Abbé Châtel murmured as he once more arranged the roses at the foot of the Virgin in the parlor: "O God, protect this child who loves you! O God, grant her happiness!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"Do you know," said Chiffon to Uncle Marc, when he returned after two weeks' absence; "that every one is incensed at you? Your letter to the voters has caused a regular upheaval in Pont-sur-Sarthe."

"It is a matter of indifference to me," was the reply.

"Yes, I know; but I am tired of hearing people harp upon the subject; all the old bores who are in the habit of coming here go on about it. I don't know why I say old, for the young ones are quite as bad, and my mother too. Only the day before yesterday, she came home in such a state because she had read your manifesto, which is posted about town."

"What did she say?"

"She made a scene with papa — a really beautiful scene; more so than usual."

"Poor Pierre," said the vicomte, laughing.

"Tell me, Chiffon," questioned Uncle Marc, "what sort of an existence do you

think I should lead here under these circumstances?"

"Under what circumstances?"

"You tell me that your mother is furious with me; she will probably treat me like a dog."

"Oh, no."

"Oh, yes; she hasn't hesitated to do so already, and now the election is still another grievance."

"Yes; but, on the other hand, there is your fortune. If she is vexed because of your politics, she will be delighted because of your inheritance; you know how she values money. Have you settled the estate?" she asked after a pause.

"Very nearly."

"And you are rich?"

"Very."

"So much the better; for M. de Bernay will make a strong fight, and you must look out for him."

"What do you know about it?"

"I have been told."

"By whom?"

"By the workmen at the blast furnace."

Uncle Marc began to laugh. "You've

been talking with the workmen in the blast furnace, have you? Poor Aubières is right; you are certainly a strange little woman."

"Have you seen M. d'Aubières?"

"Yes."

"When is he coming back?"

"He will be back for the races."

Breakfast was announced.

Madame de Bray entered the room like a whirlwind. Smiling and eager, she almost ran up to her step-brother, saying:—

"My dear Marc, I have just this instant heard that you had returned; I am delighted to see you again; we all miss you so much when you are not here; don't we, Chiffon?"

The marquise was never cordial to her step-brother, and never called her daughter "Chiffon" except when there were strangers present whom she wished to impress.

Marc looked at her in surprise, as he caught the sly look of his niece, who was laughing behind her mother's back.

"Have you seen Pierre?" inquired Madame de Bray.

"Yes; he was here when I arrived."

"Has he told you of the terrible effect which your letter to the electors has produced?" she asked, smiling.

"He did not mention it."

"Well, my poor Marc, you have no idea of the disagreeable talk connected with your name."

"Since my name is also yours, I must beg your pardon."

"Don't mention it; I have decided upon my course; at first I was dismayed, absolutely dismayed, was I not?" she said to her husband as he entered. "But now I am reconciled to the scandal caused by Marc's posters, and have taken a brave stand."

"You have said so, at least," replied M. de Bray without conviction.

As they went into the dining-room, Chiffon murmured in Uncle Marc's ear: "All serene, isn't it? I told you so — the fortune!"

"Coryse," said the marquise, as they seated themselves, "I do not know whether I remembered to tell you that we are to dine at the Barfleurs on Saturday."

"No; but you never tell me when you are to dine out."

"You are invited."

"It does not matter to me, as I shall not go."

"Why shall you not go?" asked Madame de Bray, with some embarrassment.

"Because I never go to these dinners ; and it has been agreed that I shall not go out until the winter after I am eighteen ; that will be in two years."

"But this is not going out."

"It is dressing, exhibiting one's self, and being bored ; and that's what I call going out."

"I have accepted for you."

"You should not have done so, because you have promised me that, until I am eighteen, I shall not be obliged to appear at these affairs except at home ; moreover, I do not see why I should dine at the Barfleurs, and not at Madame de Bassigny's, where I was invited for this evening. She gave me the invitation in person in the garden of the Jesuits. You remember she invited you, too, Uncle Marc ; saying at the same time that she dared not hope that you would do her the honor of accepting."

"Which proves that she has some lucid moments. I should never think of going to Madame de Bassigny's ; but now in any case I can go nowhere because I am in mourning."

Chiffon cast an amused glance at her mother's gown — a mauve gown so indefinite in

tone that one could scarcely be sure whether it was mauve or pink.

"Oh," said the marquise, "it is only a three months' mourning, and two weeks have already gone by; and, my dear Marc, I want to ask you, would you mind if we should have a ball here on Sunday in race week?"

"Not at all, provided I do not have to appear."

"But if you did not, it would seem like a reflection."

"I don't know what it would seem like; but I shall not appear at a ball a month after the death of an aunt who has left me her property. It would be in decidedly bad taste, not to say heartless!"

The marquise replied pointedly: "As we have not the same motives for denying ourselves, and as I am counting on giving this ball for Coryse" —

"For me?" exclaimed the girl in astonishment; "for a girl who detests society, and who does not know how to dance correctly? A ball for me — Heavens!"

"It is that you may learn how to carry yourself in society, and to cultivate a taste for it."

"Come, now, this will deceive nobody, this tale of a ball to be given for me. Every one knows that I count for very little in this house, and that what is to be done is not done for me."

"You are not only ungrateful but impertinent," announced Madame de Bray, in tones which seemed to vibrate in her very eyebrows.

"Not at all," replied Chiffon peaceably; "but I think it would be better to tell the truth to Uncle Marc and to outsiders as well. This ball is to astonish the natives by introducing them to the prince."

Marc de Bray asked, with surprise, "What prince?"

"Oh, surely," cried Coryse, "you don't know; you have just come back. We have have had a prince in Pont-sur-Sarthe for the last ten days, a real one, not made of pasteboard — a prince who will actually reign if his father is not deposed."

"And his name?"

"Count d'Axen when he travels."

"And what is the Count d'Axen doing here?"

The marquise was about to reply; but Chiffon did not give her time.

"They don't exactly know; they say that he is here to review some troops or to perfect

himself in French, which he speaks better than any of us."

"What sort of a fellow is this prince?" asked the vicomte, for the sake of saying something.

"He is charming," replied Madame de Bray promptly; and Chiffon just as promptly interposed:—

"That is a matter of taste. He is a little fellow, about up to your knees, and is as black as the ace of spades. M. Carnot is blond beside him. Then to hear him called 'Monseigneur' and 'Your Highness!' You can imagine how delicious it is."

"They address him as they should address him," interrupted Madame de Bray, who saw that a storm was brewing, and wished to cut short the discussion.

"Oh, I find it quite natural," said Coryse, "and I address him that way myself; only it amuses some people, and some people it doesn't. For my part, humility is not my *rôle*."

Of all the numerous weaknesses in the character of the marquise, the one which was most disagreeable to Coryse was her arrogance with her inferiors, and her complacency

toward the great. Often, after having been perfectly crushing to a servant or a workman with the superiority of her wisdom, a superiority which her daughter refused to acknowledge, Madame de Bray would complain of the stupidity of those whom she called "hirelings." Chiffon, amused, but at the same time annoyed, would say with a laugh:—

"If he had the qualities which you demand, he would probably be an ambassador instead of a servant."

It was perfectly natural to Coryse to be respectful to princes if chance threw them in her way, but she could not understand any one's running after opportunities to meet them. She hated conventionalities, and preferred to be alone, or with her equals. It seemed to her that when a modern prince tried to forget that he was a prince, it was an excess of zeal to be constantly reminding him of his position. From the moment of the count's arrival at Pont-sur-Sarthe, the marquise had been floating in a sort of heaven, and was immensely flattered because "His Highness" had called. "His Highness" had been introduced by M. d'Aubières, who, several years before, had been military attaché in

the little kingdom where his father reigned. While Madame de Bray was in Paris she had been compelled to run hither and thither in order to meet certain much-sought-after princes, who had shown her but a poor return for all her efforts. At Pont-sur-Sarthe, cut off as she was from any court and from the ceremonies for which she felt herself peculiarly fitted, it seemed as though heaven itself were opened before her when she broke the seal of the letter in which the colonel announced the arrival of this hereditary prince. For once she had completely eclipsed all Pont-sur-Sarthe, for the Count d'Axen had no acquaintances save the four generals, the major, and the Lord Mayor. She had no pity for Madame de Bassigny, her best friend; and when she hinted at a wish to be presented, Madame de Bray said indifferently:—

“It is very tiresome not to be able to ask a few friends to meet Monseigneur, but he refuses to make any acquaintances.”

It was merely because she did not wish to lose hold of the prize which had so fortunately fallen into her hands. There were many very pretty and very elegant women in Pont-sur-Sarthe. It was to be feared that the

prince, once launched, would prove unfaithful to the Bray mansion ; but he finally forced the marquise to depart from her resolution. One evening when he was calling, he said to M. de Bray :—

“I beg you to take me, if it is possible, to the ball at the Château Barfleur.”

“To the ball, what ball?” suddenly asked the marquise.

“A ball which will probably be given the Sunday in race week. I heard it mentioned this evening in the restaurant where I dined. It is not yet certain — but” —

“But,” exclaimed Madame de Bray impatiently, “the Barfleurs cannot give a ball on that day, for we are to give one ourselves !”

As there had never been any talk of a ball, Chiffon and the marquis looked at each other completely taken back by her coolness ; but Madame de Bray was not in the least embarrassed by their presence. She went on, addressing herself to her husband :—

“It is so, is it not ? We chose that day long ago ; they cannot take it from us.”

And the next day she sent out the invitations. If she herself gave the ball which should introduce “His Highness,” she would

have the honor of showing that she had been the first to know him.

Fearing that the conversation might take an unpleasant turn, the marquis tried once more to change the subject.

"If Chiffon is not to dine at the Barfleurs' on Saturday, some word ought to be sent," he said.

The marquise replied in a decided tone :—

"She will dine there."

"I could not, even if I wished to," explained the child quietly; "I have no gown."

"What, no gown? What do you mean? Where is your Pompadour gown?"

"Two years ago I had a so-called evening gown, a muslin with sprigs of flowers, which you speak of as my 'Pompadour gown;' but as I have grown two heads taller in two years, and as it has not grown with me, it is now above my ankles."

"It can be lengthened."

"It has been lengthened three times already—there is no more cloth."

"How is it that you never have anything to wear?"

"With five louis a month to dress on, in

cluding my shoes, my gloves, my hats, my habit, and all, it is not easy to get gowns," cried Chiffon, very much angered.

"Order whatever you like," interrupted M. de Bray, "and send the bill to me."

"Thank you, papa ; I will have a little white gown made for the Prince's ball then."

In a sharp, threatening tone the marquise said : —

"I forbid you to speak of it as the Prince's ball. Am I to understand that you are coming to this dinner, or not?"

"No, I am not," protested Chiffon.

"In that case you must ride over and tell Madame Barfleur that you cannot dine there Saturday ; that you are to dine at your Aunt de Launey's on that day ; and that I did not know it when I accepted for you."

"Yes," replied Coryse laughing ; "I am to tell a little tale, in which everybody is mixed up, — you, Aunt Mathilde, Uncle Albert, and everybody."

"Will you excuse me," she said, rising from the table, "if I go to Barfleur ? and if I wish to be back for my lesson, I must hurry."

"Yes," said the marquise majestically, "for this once I will allow you to leave the table

before the end of the meal; only do not imagine that it constitutes a precedent."

"I am perfectly willing to sit here till the end," said Chiffon, inwardly angry; "I don't care about going over there; nor, if I go, about being back for my lesson, so I will stay where I am. It will be much simpler to send Jean with a note. For that matter," she added, with an amused look in her eye, "why should I go? It seems very strange that I should."

"You are going," ordered the marquise, her wrath gradually rising.

"No, I would rather not; you must have some idea back of sending me off on an errand like that to the Barfleurs'."

"None at all," said Madame de Bray, blushing.

Once more the marquis tried to smooth things over.

"Come, Chiffon, do go, since you see your mamma wants you to."

"H'm," said Coryse, trying to give her step-father a warning nudge under the table.

It was too late; the marquise had heard the fatal word 'mamma,' which, applied to her, always exasperated her.

"Really," she said to her husband, "really" — and then to Coryse, "Go at once, and do what I have told you to do. Do you hear?"

"Yes," said Coryse, folding her napkin with exasperating deliberation; and as she went out she muttered between her little pointed teeth: "Oh, if only M. d'Aubières were not quite so old."

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN she arrived at the château de Barfleur, a large building of brick and granite of the time of Louis XV., Coryse saw the Vicomtesse de Barfleur at a window, standing by a long table, very much occupied in covering some pots of jam. Her work absorbed her to such an extent that she did not hear the horses pass. Chiffon, whose first idea had been to go up to the window and deliver her message without going in, decided, on second thoughts, that that would not be sufficiently polite, and so dismounted at the stable, where she was told the viscountess was at home.

She was ushered into the billiard-room, where she had to wait for what seemed to her a very long time. As she walked up and down the great bare apartment, without a picture, without an ornament, without a flower, she said to herself indignantly : —

“ Well, must I wait until Mother Barfleur covers *all* her jam-pots before she will receive me ? ”

At length the servant reappeared : —

“Will Mademoiselle d'Avènes come this way? I was looking for the viscountess in the park, and all the time she was in the drawing-room.”

“No; she was in the pantry, but probably doesn't want me to know it,” Coryse thought, as she trotted after the servant through a long, dreary suite of rooms.

“Br-r-r!” she said, almost shivering. “It's not at all amusing here. Father Ragon and Mother Barfleur deceive themselves if they think that I am going to marry the young man. I believe they do think so. Oh no, no, no!”

The servant took Coryse into a small reception-room, which was a little more comfortable and a little better furnished than the rest of the château. Seated near the window, her tall, slender form clad in a gown of dark red foulard, was the viscountess, apparently occupied in reading “Le Gaulois.”

“It is not surprising that I have had to wait,” thought the child. “The gown she had on was gray, and she has slipped into one of her very best frocks to receive me. She dresses up for Chiffon, now that Uncle Marc has suddenly become rich!”

"My dear child," said the viscountess, rising to meet Coryse, "what good wind has blown you here?" Then, without giving her time to answer, she added, "how pretty you are in your habit!"

"Pretty," murmured Chiffon, looking at her long arms and hands, and her as yet undeveloped figure; "that is not what they tell me at home."

"Yes; pretty and charming!" said Madame de Barfleur, not in the least disconcerted. She pulled at the long band of old tapestry which served as a bell-rope. "I want to send for Hugh. He would be in despair to miss this nice little visit. He has gone to see his horses in the big pasture on the river-bank."

"Pray, do not, Madame," said Chiffon hastily, "I must go. I have a lesson at four o'clock."

The servant entered.

"Send for M. le Vicomte."

"I only came," said Coryse, "to say to you, that when my mother told you that I would come with her on Saturday, she forgot that I was to dine that day at my aunt's."

"What," said Madame de Barfleur, "impossible! We cannot get along without you."

Arrange it with your aunt, or let me do so."

Chiffon did not answer; she was listening with a smile to the big bell which they were ringing wildly to call the young master, and thinking, "It will take him a quarter of an hour at least to get up here from the river, and in five minutes I shall be gone."

"I beg of you, my dear girl," insisted the viscountess, "promise me some way to come. You will be the life and joy of the dinner."

"I?" interrupted the child in astonishment. "I? When I am ill at ease I can't say three words."

"And why should you not be at your ease, my dear?" asked Madame de Barfleur.

"I beg your pardon," exclaimed Chiffon, blushing; "that was a break—I meant to say, that wherever I go I am ill at ease, because I have no confidence in myself; and you see I have reason to feel this way."

"No, you are a charming young girl, very simple and very frank."

Coryse rose, saying, "I must go; I must get back home."

"You will wait a moment, won't you, to have a little lunch first?"

"Thank you, Madame; I am already late."

The viscountess rose too; and when Chiffon begged her not to distress herself, replied:—

"Yes; I wish to see you on horseback; my son tells me that you are adorable on a horse."

"It must be true," thought Chiffon.

"They all seem to agree."

Just as old Jean brought the horses to the steps, the Vicomte de Barfleur appeared. He took the hand that Chiffon extended, and bowing respectfully, touched it with his lips.

Not accustomed to this sort of greeting, she could scarcely help laughing. Then comparing the manner of both mother and son with their manner of two weeks before, her heart sank, and she thought almost out loud:

"What poor stuff these people are made of!"

As Coryse stepped up to Josephine, the big high-bred mare she always rode, the viscount rushed forward clasping his two hands, and held them out to assist her to mount. She looked at the delicate young man from head to foot, and said to herself:—

"He would surely let me slip;" then, with the most gracious manner she could assume,

she replied, pointing to old Jean who was holding the horses:—

“No; but would you instead hold the other horse for a moment? I am very awkward; I can only mount with Jean. I should fall with you, and you can't imagine how heavy I am,—heavy as lead.”

She placed the tip of her boot in the hand of old Jean, and fairly flew into the saddle; then, bidding farewell to mother and son, she rode off.

As soon as they had left the park, Chiffon turned into the woods. She was longing for a gallop in the beautiful green paths, for she needed to quiet her perturbed spirits.

Would they never let her alone for a moment? It was barely two weeks since they had tried to force her to marry M. d'Aubières, and now it was little Barfleur. This troubled her, not only because of the new struggle she had to undergo, but because it wounded her self-respect. She had been grateful and flattered by M. d'Aubières' offer; by that of M. de Barfleur she should feel humiliated. As long as she had had no fortune, he had only paid her the attention that a well-bred young

man pays to a young girl whom he meets in her parents' home. This ungainly fellow seemed hideous to her, with his enormous mustache, and his thin legs, crooked, as the result of poor riding. Strong and healthy herself, Chiffon had an instinctive horror of thin, sickly people.

As she rode towards Pont-sur-Sarthe, she thought: "He is perfectly disgusting to me; if he should ever kiss me, as M. d'Aubières did, I should slap his face. I couldn't help it. There will be a great row if I refuse again; I must manage in some way, so that the refusal shall come from the Barfleurs. Oh, that wretched Father Ragon! it is he who has concocted this affair; I was right in fearing the Jesuits."

The road before her gleamed white in the sunlight.

"It will be awful to ride in this heat to Pont-sur-Sarthe," she thought; "I will try the path behind the blast furnace. There is not much smoke at this hour; and I think Josephine will not mind it."

At a turn in the path she suddenly perceived at some distance above her, on a side path which came down between the woods

and the forge, a horseman who had stopped to talk to some workmen who were sitting on the ground at the edge of the forest.

"Ah!" she cried, turning to old Jean, "I am too late for my class. There are the workmen at lunch; it is four o'clock. See! that looks like Count d'Axen."

"Yes; Mam'selle Coryse, it is."

The path was a winding one, so Chiffon lost sight of the group; but shortly after, as she came nearer, she plainly heard their voices.

"Yes," the prince was saying in the pleasant tones which she recognized at once. "Yes; this profession of faith is wholly commendable; and if I were a voter here, I should not hesitate to give my vote to the man who wrote this manifesto."

Here Chiffon came to a sudden turn in the path.

"Is it you, Monsei —" she cried; then she stopped, with a feeling that perhaps he would prefer not to hear his title mentioned here. With a glance he thanked her, and replied:—

"Yes, Mademoiselle; it is I."

"Here, sir," said one of the workmen, laughing, "here is a young lady who is of your way of thinking."

"What's that?" asked Coryse.

"This gentleman's been a-tellin' of us that in our place he would vote for M. de Bray."

"I should think so," said Coryse, "unless you want to re-elect M. de Bernay."

"No, no; we have no use for him; but we don't jes' like M. de Bray having a title."

"He does not like it either," said Chiffon; "but it's not his fault."

"Why does he sign his posters 'Vicomte de Bray?'"

"Because it's his name. Would you prefer to have him resort to trickery, to present himself as other than he is?"

With a glance at the empty bottles, the cheese, and the Bologna saugages that lay scattered on the grass, Chiffon said:—

"It looks as though you had been having a lunch."

One of the workmen, a dark, hairy fellow, rose, and, pointing to Count d'Axen, said:—

"It's his treat, because we held his horse while he went to the forge, otherwise"—

Old Jean, hot and tired, was gazing longingly upon the bottles; and Coryse, noticing him, said to one of the men:—

"If you want to be kind, you will give

him a glass of something, for he is very warm."

The workman seized a bottle, and attempting to excuse himself, said, "If we did not offer him some, it was because we did not dare, seeing that you were around."

"Come, Jean, and have a drink."

"I sha'n't refuse," he said, looking highly pleased; "it's the sort of a day that makes one thirsty. You must be thirsty, too, Mademoiselle Coryse."

"Would you have a glass? Don't let us stand in the way," said the workman who held the bottle.

"I should like one," said Chiffon, putting out her hand.

"Wait a minute, for you I must rinse the glass." He ran to a pump near the forge, and came back asking:—

"Will you have beer or wine?"

"Wine."

She held up the glass, saying:—

"Your health."

The workmen rose:—

"We ought to drink to his health," said one of the men pointing to Count d'Axen.

"I propose to drink to the health of the political candidate."

"That's right," cried Coryse gayly, "to Uncle Marc's health."

"Oh! are you the niece of M. de Bray?"

"Yes," said Chiffon, looking at the prince, who was laughing to himself.

"We know you well," continued the workman; "but we did not know your name. All the little kids in the town know her," he continued, turning toward Count d'Axen. "Mademoiselle always has money in her pockets for them. At Christmas-time she bought them a whole box of playthings which filled the carriage. They had more than they could break. If all rich people were like her, and you, sir, things would be better; but there are those who won't believe poverty exists; I know lots like that."

"So do I," said Chiffon involuntarily, thinking of her mother. "Are you going on to Pont-sur-Sarthe, Monsie — Monsieur?" she asked, turning to Count d'Axen.

"Yes; will you permit me to go part of the way with you?"

"Certainly; only it will be better to take the path through the woods; this one is too full of rolling stones."

When they had disappeared among the

trees, Coryse heard the workingman's voice explaining : —

"I have an idea that those two are lovers."

She turned to the prince, laughing.

"They are speaking of us, Monseigneur."

He bowed courteously. "I regret that they are mistaken."

"You regret it? What a fine thing politeness is. Imagine me a reigning princess. Can you? What would you do with me? and what would I do with you?" she added, after a pause.

He began to laugh.

"How old are you, Mademoiselle Coryse?"

"I was sixteen in May; and you, Monseigneur?"

"I shall be twenty-four in about a week." Seized with a sudden scruple, he said : "Tell me, does your mother permit you to ride with young men?"

"Oh, no, indeed; but you are a sovereign; and a sovereign is not a young man; that does not count." She blushed and continued, stammering : —

"That is — I mean to say — that it counts too much to count."

Then wishing to change the subject, she said : —

"Tell me, Monseigneur, are you not afraid that you will be picked up and carried off to the frontier, if you, a foreigner, do this sort of thing — take sides with the politics of the opposition?"

"Oh! I take sides in a mild sort of way. I merely tell the workmen that if I were in their place I should vote for your uncle."

"All the same, in your place I should be afraid. I wish M. d'Aubières were here; he would tell you what you could and could not do; you seem a little new at all this."

"You take an interest in me, then?" asked the prince, laughing heartily.

"Yes and no."

"That is something. It is strange how mistaken one can be. I could have sworn — I, who have what are called intuitions — not only that you were not interested in me, but that I repelled you."

"And it was true," cried Coryse frankly, "until a little while ago; but all at once it struck me that you were a fine fellow."

"Then we are friends?"

"Yes, yes, Monseigneur; I beg your pardon, I have not addressed you politely; I

have not said, 'Monseigneur' often enough, and never 'Your Highness'."

"Don't mention that; and now that we are friends, won't you tell me why we were not so; that is, why you were not, for I assure you I have never felt any repulsion."

"Yes; I will tell you. I dislike foreigners instinctively, and I detest Protestants; and as you are both, you see" —

"I understand. What have you against foreigners?"

"I don't like their not being French!"

"And against Protestants?"

"A lot of things. I find them scheming, false, hypocritical, and all sorts of things; though, naturally, I recognize that there are exceptions."

"Naturally — myself in the first place."

She laughed.

"Not you alone; others too; but I speak of the mass of Protestants, — French Protestants, I mean, for they are the only ones I know."

"Now that I know the sort of aversion that I inspired, I can imagine that you took me for a spy."

"Oh, no, Monseigneur; not that,"

Returning to the subject which interested her, Chiffon said : —

“ All the same, it is extremely kind of you to work for Uncle Marc's election.”

“ You have no reason to be grateful, for I confess to you that the conversation you overheard was the result of mere chance. Those men had looked after my horse while I visited the forge. I did not know which one had held him, and feared that if I gave a single piece of money I should bring down a storm upon my head. So I went to the inn on the high road, and had a lunch sent to them. They offered me a drink, and I talked to them of the candidates whose manifestos are posted on the forge buildings ; so you see that my propaganda amounted to very little.”

“ At the same time, it served its purpose. You will soon see how nice Uncle Marc is. Now that he is back, I am sure you will find the house much less dull.”

“ But I have never found it that,” protested the prince.

“ Come now, you can't make me believe that you have not been bored there. But how is it, Monseigneur, that Uncle Marc's socialistic proclamation does not shock you ; for you know he is a socialist ? ”

"And so am I."

"You mustn't say much about it in Pont-sur-Sarthe; it might have bad results. What! you a socialist, Monseigneur; will you not find it awkward in your position?"

"I hope not; but if I do, I'll give up the succession. It will be easy for me; I have six brothers. And were you on an electioneering expedition when I met you, Mademoiselle Coryse?"

"No; I had been to the Barfleurs' on an errand."

"M. de Barfleur is a very thin little man; isn't he?"

"He is, indeed."

"And he affects the English manner?"

"The English manner of Pont-sur-Sarthe, — yes."

"Has he a fine château?"

"Fine enough; but it belongs to his mother."

"Is she agreeable?"

"Not at all; she is a small, slender woman, who poses constantly. She is majestic, and affects melancholy. You would suppose she had just had a great misfortune. I am always longing to call her 'the unfortunate princess.' I do not mean to be unkind, or

to make fun of them ; but I cannot bear the Barfleurs."

"Is there only the mother and son?"

"Heavens! that is enough."

"I suppose I shall meet them at the ball which your mother is going to give?"

"You certainly will; but what is that to you?"

"I am curious to see them. After Parisian society, which I know a little, provincial society" —

"Much good may it do you! If you could only know how paltry it is, and how gossipy and superficial. And you are above all that."

"But I am above nothing."

"Outside of it, then, if you prefer. Monseigneur, perhaps it will be better not to mention that we had this ride together."

"Oh, do you, too, fear the gossips?"

"Not at all; but I am afraid that my mother would send me away if she knew it."

"What ought I to do?"

"Say nothing about it; and I will not mention it unless I am asked about it; and as they won't ask" —

"It seems quite improbable that any one should guess at this encounter of ours."

"If they should do so, we will acknowledge it."

"Agreed."

"And now we must separate. Before we leave the woods, I want to ask your pardon for all my mistakes, Monseigneur." Then, laughing, she added, "And I bid your Highness a most respectful adieu."

The prince held his hat aloft, and, laughing in his turn, replied : —

"My most profound respects, Mademoiselle Chiffon."

CHAPTER X.

FOR a week Chiffon could not take a step without meeting little Barfleur. He called several times on the pretext of errands for his mother; and one evening, coming into the drawing-room just before dinner, Coryse found him installed between M. and Madame de Bray. She had seen him drive up in his cart about six o'clock, but supposed that he had gone; so she started in amazement when she saw him.

"M. de Barfleur has consented to stay to dinner with us," said the marquise, who seemed to be in fine humor. "We will take him home this evening when we go out to drive."

During the summer, M. and Madame de Bray drove regularly after dinner, taking Chiffon with them, much to her disgust. Seated in the landau opposite her parents, she scarcely dared to smile; and sat quiet and bored,—as she always was in the presence of the marquise,—always expecting the scene that she feared.

When Marc de Bray entered, his face expressed so much astonishment at the sight of little Barfleur, that Coryse began to laugh; and as her mother started towards the dining-room on the arm of the viscount, Coryse said to Uncle Marc, who seemed vexed and annoyed:—

“You did not expect this, did you?”

Without noticing the anxious look on his brother's face, Marc answered:—

“Is he considered one of the family now?”

“Not yet,” said Chiffon, laughing; “but he hopes to be.”

Uncle Marc stood still.

“What do you mean?” he asked abruptly.

Pushing them before him, M. de Bray said imploringly, but in an undertone:—

“Go on, children; go on.”

“Why this delay?” said the marquise sharply; then, pointing to little Barfleur, “M. de Barfleur is waiting.”

From the time dinner began, the Vicomte de Barfleur, who sat opposite Coryse, looked at her with a persistence amounting to poor taste. The girl, who was very near-sighted, did not notice it; but Marc de Bray found it extremely irritating. This irritation became so apparent, that Chiffon finally asked:—

"What is the matter with you to-night, Uncle Marc? You seem to be so grumpy."

"Nothing," he said; "I have a headache."

But in spite of his pretended headache, he began to talk to his niece, and did not again give her a chance to turn her head away from him.

Displeased with this proceeding, which seemed to her unseemly, the marquise tried several times to bring Chiffon into the general conversation; but in vain. Unable to obtain anything by strategy, Madame de Bray decided to take the bull by the horns.

"Coryse, your manners are very bad; you are making too much noise; one cannot hear one's self think."

The child stopped in the middle of a sentence, and did not speak again.

"But I do not forbid you to speak—to answer M. de Barfleur."

Sweetly and politely, Chiffon replied:—

"M. de Barfleur only talks about hunting and racing; and they are things I detest, and know nothing about."

"What would you like to talk about, Mademoiselle?" asked little Barfleur impressively.

In the same modest and submissive tone, she answered:—

“About nothing, Monsieur; I get on very well without talking at all.”

“One would not have thought it a few minutes ago,” remarked Madame de Bray sharply.

“It is true; I was noisy; I beg your pardon,” answered Chiffon; and dropping her eyes, she stared at her plate, and did not speak during the rest of the meal.

Later, after she had served the coffee in the billiard-room, Chiffon went out and sat on the veranda in a big wicker chair, and watched the stars, which looked very pale in the twilight sky. She was interrupted by her mother, who came out with her hat on.

“What! you are not ready? The carriage is here; you are the most hopelessly thoughtless girl!”

“Bah!” said the child, not stirring. “Go on without me; I will be ready when you come back to look for what you have forgotten.”

Uncle Marc burst out laughing and M. de Bray turned his head to conceal the smile which he could not restrain. The marquise

turned purple with rage, and asked threateningly, "What do you mean?"

"I mean that every night you come back to look for something that you forget; and to-night," she added in an undertone, "you will be more apt to come twice than once."

She referred to one of her mother's little ways; one of the weaknesses which the marquis thought no one perceived.

Fond as she was of luxury, display, and of all that, in her opinion, would dazzle the public, Madame de Bray had finally after great effort succeeded in persuading her husband to make a change for her sake in his carriages and liveries, which had been very pretty, and very simple, so long as they had been selected by him. The new landau, which was dark blue with red wheels, and with an enormous coat-of-arms embossed upon it, was absurd for all useful purposes. But the marquis was never so happy as when she was going from one end of Pont-sur-Sarthe to the other in this striking equipage; and she compelled Coryse to accompany her, because when she did not come, they drove in the victoria, and the victoria was a most modest affair. When Madame de Bray could pass by the

restaurants in the Place du Palais, lying back in her showy landau, with its harness of shining plate, its chains, its rings, and its armorial bearings, her joy was at its height. At six o'clock and again at eight, the tables which filled the sidewalks, almost driving foot-passengers away, were over-flowing with people. Then the officers and fashionables of Pont-sur-Sarthe met at Gilbert's, the small restaurant, or at the Café Perault. Instead of letting her coachman take a good, though somewhat deserted, macadamized street, which led directly out of the city, Madame de Bray gave orders for him to drive past the restaurant, on a road paved with horrible little shiny, slippery stones; and often, as they turned into one of the streets which led away from her favorite quarter, she would stop him suddenly, and order him to return to the house. Chiffon was only too familiar with her. "Ah! *Mon Dieu!* I have forgotten my parasol again," or "my wrap," or "my muff," or "my handkerchief;" which compelled them to drive a second, and sometimes a third, time past her dear café.

She had a perfect horror of these exhibitions; and when she saw the curious faces in

the crowd turned toward the carriage, when she heard the clanking of the officers' sabers, and the click of their spurs as they rose to greet them, she dropped her eyes, and said to herself: —

“What fun all those people must make of us in their secret hearts!” and she raged inwardly at being obliged to share in the small maneuvers which made her mother so ridiculous. The marquis and his brother had not been blind to all this, but they had never spoken upon the subject; so Chiffon's reply surprised and amused them.

The marquise turned perfectly white, and walking up to her daughter, so close that her lips almost touched her small, impertinent nose, asked, — almost hissed, — “Why do you think we will return twice rather than once this evening; why?”

“Because,” replied Coryse, first assuring herself that little Barfleur, who was pretending to look for his hat at the other end of the drawing-room, could not hear them, “because this evening you have some one to exhibit to the populace.”

While she was speaking, it occurred to her that she should soon have to pass all those

people, seated by the viscount's side in the dark blue landau. It was all that would be needed in Pont-sur-Sarthe to give the impression of their engagement, and that Coryse wished to avoid at any cost. She had never considered herself of any importance until now. In her own eyes she was still a child, whom no one took seriously. M. d'Aubière's offer and Father Ragon's insinuations had taught her that she was now a young lady who was loved by the one, and whom the *protégé* of the other was pretending to love. Without giving her mother a chance to make a scene, Chiffon added : —

“Don't trouble yourself about me; I shall not go out; I am tired.”

“It is not true; you are never tired.”

“Very well, then, it is a pretext. In either case, I am not going out this evening.”

“You shall go. Go and put on your hat.”

As Chiffon did not stir, her mother seized her harshly by the wrist. The child broke away with an effort, and said gently : —

“It is absurd, you know, — this little family scene, — before a stranger.”

The marquise turned toward M. de Barfleur with an attempt at a smile, “Oh! M. de Bar-

fleur is almost one of the household," she said.

"That may be," replied Chiffon with a desire to define the situation; "but he is not almost one of the family; and one of your favorite proverbs is that one should wash one's linen" —

"Good, good."

Then, after a silence during which the marquis and the viscount, their overcoats on their arms, and canes in their hands, awaited the signal for departure, the marquise said graciously: —

"If I insist upon your going with us, it is because it is not proper for you to stay at home alone."

"I always do; besides, I am not alone, because Uncle Marc is here."

"But he will probably go out."

"You know very well, my dear sister-in-law," replied Marc de Bray dryly, "that I never go out in the evening."

"Then I put Coryse in your charge."

Shrugging his shoulders, Uncle Marc replied somewhat nervously: —

"I will take good care of her, and will try to keep her clean, and not let her play with the fire."

As little Barfleur bent over the hand which Coryse mechanically extended to him, and kissed it languidly, Marc took his niece by the arm and whirled her around, saying, —

“Come, Chiffon, let us go in.”

When they were alone in the little reception-room, Coryse said gayly : —

“We had quite a rumpus, hadn't we? And yet they did not need me to-night, since there was a third to compel them to use the landau.”

As she saw her uncle seating himself by the lamp, and undoing a bundle of newspapers, she added, “If you have anything to do, don't feel obliged to stay with me.”

“I was about to say the same to you.”

“It does not matter to me whether I do my tapestry here or elsewhere; but when papa goes out in the evening, you usually work in your own room.”

“True,” he replied, laughing; “but on those evenings, which in winter are almost all the evenings, you were not given into my special care as you were to-night.”

Coryse took up a large piece of silk tapestry covered with animals and strange warriors, which she was copying from a piece of Bayeux tapestry, and came and sat near Uncle Marc.

After a moment he paused in his reading, looking over his paper at the little fluffy head leaning over the embroidery.

"Chiffon," he said suddenly, "before dinner, speaking of that young fellow, I said: 'Is he one of the family at present?' And you replied, 'Not yet; but he wants to be.'"

"Yes," said the girl scornfully.

"Well," continued Uncle Marc hesitatingly, "I did not quite understand what you meant by that."

"I meant that he would like to marry me."

The viscount jumped to his feet.

"I fancied that was it, but I could not believe it! And you can speak calmly of this! Marry you! that buffoon! he must be crazy! It would be monstrous!"

"You need not worry. He will not marry me," said Chiffon, laughing.

"Heaven be praised," murmured Uncle Marc, reassured. She looked at him affectionately.

"You are very good to bother about me; do you realize that you are responsible for his desire to marry me?"

"I?"

"Yes; as soon as it was known that you

had come into some money, it was reported that I should be very rich; that you would give me a dot; and that you would leave me all your fortune."

"That is all true."

"But your own children?"

"My children! Have I any children?"

"No; but when you marry."

"I shall not marry, Chiffon, for fear of happening upon a woman like"—

He was going to say "like your mother;" but he paused, and went on:—

"Like some that I know. No; I am distrustful. I shall remain an old bachelor."

"So much the better, and then, if you wish, I will go and live with you; I will keep house for you. I don't want to marry either; but after I am twenty-one, I certainly do not wish to remain here,—not one day,—in spite of poor papa, who is so good, and who will miss me very much. But I know that, on the other hand, my absence will smooth out for him many of the little difficulties of life; and yet I fancy he will miss Chiffon."

"You say that you will go away; where will you go?" asked the viscount.

"I have always thought I would ask Aunt

Mathilde and Uncle Albert to take me again. But if you would like me, I should be very, very glad. If you only knew how fond I am of you! I love you better than papa. Perhaps it is not right; but I can't help it."

Leaning towards him, she said in her tender, mellow voice, "I simply adore you!"

"I do not deserve to be adored, my little girl," he murmured, turning pale, and drawing back his chair.

"Oh, but you do."

"Instead of keeping house for your old bear of an uncle, you will marry, and have a lot of shrieking infants, whom you will consider a great improvement on Gribouille and old Jean."

"I am sure that I shall not marry," she answered quite seriously, "yes, sure; I cannot explain to you how I feel, but, as a matter of fact, no one seems to appeal to me."

"No one? What do you know about it? Poor Aubières is certainly a splendid fellow, clever and good, though he is not as young as he once was; as to the other, he is a little monster."

Coryse began to laugh, and said, "Tell that to Madame Delorme."

"Ah, you also know the gossip. What Madame Delorme — who, by the way, is a perfect idiot, — likes in Barfleur is his name, his title, his English dress, his horses, and his château."

"I believe you; but at any rate that is something — something which many another woman might be fond of also; while, as for me, I feel that I shall never love any one."

"Perhaps you are already in love with some one?" he asked anxiously.

"With no one in the world!" cried Chiffon, so positively that Uncle Marc was quite reassured.

"No," she continued, "no one pleases me, — as a husband, understand. Take for instance Paul de Lussy, whom people find so attractive, and M. de Trêne, whom they are all fighting over. I don't care anything about them. I know that it is absurd for me to say so, and that, with my face, I have no right to be so difficult to please."

"With your face?" questioned Marc. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, plain as I am."

"Plain; you plain?"

"I am perfectly aware of it," she said sadly; "and it's a great trial to me."

"Does your mother tell you that? You are pretty, very pretty. Don't you know it?"

"You say that to please me; or perhaps you even think so, because you are fond of me."

"Listen, Chiffon," said Uncle Marc, "I repeat in all seriousness that you are a very pretty woman, and that you will be more so in two or three years. Do you think that Aubières, man of the world that he is, would have been so mad about you if you had not been pretty? You ought to know the truth; and you can believe your old uncle."

"What!" cried the girl joyfully. "You say that I am a pretty woman, a pretty woman! How amusing, and how pleased I am, and how I thank you for telling me! But that need not stand in the way of my being a good housekeeper for you; on the contrary, please Uncle Marc, I beg of you, say 'yes' to me; and until that time don't go away; do not leave me here alone. If you only knew how horrible those two weeks were to me. I cannot get along without seeing you; I cannot."

Slipping from her chair, Coryse sat down on the floor like a baby, leaning her little

head, which in the pale light of the lamp looked like a nest of silvery moss, against the knees of the viscount. Plaintively, her eyes filling with tears, she implored :—

“You will not go away again? Promise me that you will not.”

With a violent effort he tried to rise; but she forced him to sit down again, and, holding him tightly in her arms, she said :—

“You push me away; why do you act so with me, tell me? I have noticed it several times; you are not the same. There was a time when you took me on your lap, you kissed me” —

“There was a time when you were a little girl; now you are no longer at the age for that,” he answered harshly.

Two big tears rolled rapidly down her rosy cheeks, and she murmured :—

“One is never too old to be loved.”

“I do love you; I love you dearly,” said Uncle Marc, with emotion; “only I beg of you, get up; go and sit down.”

As he was trying to push her from him, the bell rang in a timid, hesitating way. Marc shook Chiffon's arm.

“Get up, quick; do you hear? This is all wrong. What if it were a caller?”

She rose with a merry look in her face once more.

"A caller!" she said. "A caller with a ring like that, so shamefaced? It sounds more like the cook's lover."

The servant entered and announced, "M. le Comte d'Axen."

"Madam la Marquise is out," cried Coryse.

"Show him in," ordered Marc, who seemed relieved.

"What!" said Chiffon, astonished. "You are going to receive him?" Her face fell as she added: "It was so nice with no one but ourselves." Then suddenly looking at her uncle, she said: "What is the matter with you? You are so pale, I have never seen you look like that."

"Nothing," said Marc, embarrassed; "it is the heat; it will be over in a moment."

He stepped forward to greet the prince, while Chiffon followed him with her eyes.

"Monseigneur, my sister-in-law is out; my niece will have to present me to your Highness."

As Chiffon, glued to the spot, seemed to be a thousand miles away, he said: —

"Coryse, did you not hear?"

She ran quickly forward.

"Oh, Monseigneur, this is Uncle Marc, for whose election you have been working." Then turning to her uncle, who looked very much astonished, she said: —

"Oh, you don't know about it; that is true, I have not seen you alone since yesterday. On the way back from Barfleur, imagine my discovering monseigneur explaining to the workmen in the blast-furnace that they ought to vote for you, and washing down his explanations with good liquor. But you mustn't say anything, you know, about my meeting Monseigneur, and riding with him in the forest; but I did ride with him."

Then, turning to the prince, she added: —

"It's all right with Uncle Marc, you know; one can tell him anything."

Noticing that Marc was listening with raised eyebrows, and a serious look, which with him showed a certain dissatisfaction, she added mournfully: —

"Always excepting to-day; I don't know what is the matter with him today; he is out of sorts."

"I came," said the prince, "to thank Madame de Bray for the kind letter she has just written me."

"Again!" said Chiffon in amazement; then to herself, "she writes to him twice a day, then."

"She proposed," continued the count, "to send me some invitations for the ball, in case I desired to invite any one; and she took the trouble to send me a list, which I return."

He laid an envelope on the table, and said as he arose, "I will not trouble you any longer."

"But, Monseigneur," insisted Uncle Marc, with a cordiality that surprised Coryse, "if you have nothing to do this evening we should be delighted" —

Chiffon slipped out to order the tea; then she put Gribouille to bed, and went to see if her flowers had been watered; and when she returned to the room, the two men who were talking of a thousand things in which both were interested, paid no further attention to her.

When the prince left at eleven o'clock, Coryse asked Uncle Marc how he liked him.

"I found him very intelligent and agreeable. Why did you give me the opposite impression?"

"Did I?"

"You told me that he only came up to my

knees, and that he was as black as the ace of spades."

"Well, it is true; he is ugly, according to my views."

"And who could be considered handsome according to your views?"

"Well, I hardly know, unless it were yourself."

"I?"

"Yes; I don't mean that you are beautiful in the Greek sense, but I like you as you are; I detest insignificant people, and small and sickly ones, and I hate young men; a man does not seem a man at all until he is thirty-five."

"Bless me! it is unfortunate for poor Aubières that you don't place the limit a little further along. As for the prince, I consider him a great success."

"So do I; but only since I met him the other day, and had such a nice talk with him."

Uncle Marc again raised his eyebrows.

"We must talk a little about this adventure of yours," he said. "Your mother is certainly right sometimes; you act like a little girl with no bringing-up. At your age, do you think

you should go running around the woods alone with a young man?"

"Oh, but a king?"

"What difference does that make? A king is a man."

"If you look at it in that way, perhaps; but then I was not entirely alone."

"Yes, you had Jean, I suppose, — old idiot."

With a mournful shake of the head, the child murmured: —

"*Mon Dieu!* how disagreeable you are getting."

"Disagreeable because I do not approve of your whims? Because I do not encourage you to flirt in the woods with every passing adventurer?"

With a laugh she answered: —

"Now he is an adventurer; a moment ago he was a great success."

The viscount showed considerable irritation.

"I have had enough of these ways of yours. Perhaps it is true that I have spoiled you, and laughed when you have acted like a wild colt. It is no longer amusing. If I have encouraged you in evil ways, if what has come to pass is in any way my fault, I repent of it

bitterly. His voice was choking in spite of its hardness. Chiffon tried to take his hands, but he repulsed her. Then, as she faced him, utterly cast down, she murmured feebly, but with intense emotion which she tried to conceal:—

"Your trip has changed you, Uncle Marc, in a way that is hard to understand."

CHAPTER XI.

THE day of the Barfleurs' dinner M. de Bray had a terrible cold, and he announced to his wife that he could not go out. He said he was feverish, and would go to bed until the next day.

"It is a shabby trick to play the Barfleurs," cried Madame de Bray; "she expects to have fourteen at the table, and now there will be but thirteen. One can't fill a place two hours before a dinner."

"I am sorry, but I feel too ill to go. You think that if thirteen sit down at a table, one of the number will die in the course of the year; while I am positive I should die, even though there were fourteen at the table, if I went out in the condition I am in."

"I hope at least that Coryse will take your place," said the marquise.

"I? never," said the girl decidedly.

"Chiffon, dear, it would be very good of you," said M. de Bray.

"Oh, don't ask me, I beg of you. In the

first place," she explained, thinking she had found an excellent pretext for staying at home, "I must dine with Uncle Marc; otherwise he would be all alone, as you are not going to sit up."

Marc, who up to this time had not appeared to hear a word of what was going on, earnestly protested.

"Not at all," he said; "don't bother about me. What an idea! Upon my word, one would think I needed a nurse!"

"No; but you know you hate to eat alone."

"I never said so."

"Why," said Chiffon, astonished, "you have said so a hundred times."

"Well, if I have, I didn't know what I was saying; and if you want to be a good girl, Chiffon, you will go to this dinner with your mother; you will go for my sake."

"What?" thought Chiffon, "after all that he said not two days ago about little Barfleur and the idea of his marrying me, he now wants to send me to their house, when I never go anywhere. Does he want to give me the appearance of running after him?" To her uncle she replied:—

"Not under any circumstances shall I go to the Barfleurs' this evening."

"Why not?" asked Madame de Bray.

"I told you the other day—I have no gown."

"But the new one your father is to give you?"

"I have ordered it for to-morrow. It will not be done in time."

"Well, then, you could easily have your pompadour gown fixed up!"

"As I have worn long dresses for more than a year, it would look rather queer. When I sit down in it you can see up to my knees."

Uncle Marc rose.

"Put on your hat, and come with me. I will see that you have a gown at once."

"Well," said Coryse, "if you are so crazy about my going, I will go, simply because you wish me to."

As she left the room, she said to herself, looking reproachfully at Marc, who avoided meeting her eye:—

"He does not want to be left alone with me again; what can it mean?"

The viscount took Chiffon to the most fashionable dressmaker in Pont-sur-Sarthe, a

dressmaker whom she only knew by name, and whose very staircase she mounted with respect. Not only was Chiffon's modest allowance insufficient to permit her to get her gown of Madame Bertin, but the marquise herself did not go to this great dressmaker. The marquise was entirely lacking in taste ; incapable of distinguishing the grace of a well-cut gown from the ugliness of one that was badly cut ; caring only for color, trimmings, and material. A woman's dress was to her "effective or not effective." If she could say of a gown "it is not effective," no matter how delicious a creation it might be, it lacked the desirable quality ; and if she saw it on some fashionable woman she would exclaim, "How astonishing ! Madame X ———, who spends so much money on her dress, always gets things which produce no effect." For her, tailors and dressmakers who made you pay for their style were "thieves." She considered only the price of the material and the number of yards that were used ; and it was perfectly useless to explain to her that cut was everything. It was the same with art. She could not understand, she said, how people could be such fools as to pay 15,000 francs for a portrait, when one could get one

for 2,000, even more elaborate. If a novel was not filled with events and intrigues, it seemed "very crude" to her; and she declared that she could not understand any one's caring for Loti, who was entirely lacking in imagination. So she bought her own materials, and had them made up by some obscure dressmaker, with the result that her gowns never became her. Chiffon employed the same system and with the same result, except that her materials were better selected, and the design she chose was very simple, always about the same thing, — a sort of Russian blouse, loose, and scarcely defining her exquisite little figure.

When Uncle Marc, followed by his niece, entered Madame Bertin's apartments, Coryse was surprised to find that he was well known there.

"What can he have had to do with dress-makers?" she thought, "and with a dress-maker who was neither Madame de Bray's, nor Luce de Givry's, who was very simple in her tastes, nor Madam de Bassigny's, who was afraid she might meet objectionable women there."

While they were waiting for Madame

Bertin, who was busy with a fitting, Chiffon asked curiously:—

“How is it that they seem to know you here?”

“I have been here—I—I came—I designed some costumes for the de Lussacs’ ball last year.”

“‘A costume,’ not ‘some,’” she said, correcting him; “I remember very well, now, you designed one for Madame de Liron.”

“Hers and others.”

“No, hers and no others; it made talk enough.”

“Do not speak so loud.”

“No one is listening,” said Chiffon, glancing at the girls who were going and coming attending to their business.

She was silent and absorbed for a moment; then she murmured, as though continuing a conversation already begun with herself:—

“Another woman who deceives her husband—that Madame de Liron.”

“For heaven’s sake be quiet,” cried Uncle Marc, looking uneasily about. “Young girls should not talk of things about which they know nothing and ought to know nothing.”

“I know that, and I don’t know much; but

I hear things, don't I? I have to, unless I put cotton in my ears."

"One only hears when one is willing to listen."

"Not at all; I never listen, and I am always hearing things I would rather not. This about Madame de Liron, for example."

"I forbid you to use names; some servant, some maid from her house, might overhear."

"Do you think the people in her house don't know what their mistress does?"

"In any case they don't need to hear it from you."

"Or from you, I suppose," she said; and then added nervously, "I don't see why you are always talking about Madame de Liron."

"I? Did I introduce the subject this time?"

At this point the door of one of the fitting-rooms opened, and Madame de Liron herself, in a cloud of pink gauze, entered, followed by Madame Bertin.

"They told me you were here! I did not want to let you go without saying 'Good-morning' to you."

She shook the viscount's hand, and, turning to Chiffon, said:—

"Good - morning, Mademoiselle Coryse ;" then to Marc : "You have come to have a gown made?"

"Yes; for my niece," he replied, hesitating and embarrassed.

The little creature burst out laughing.

"You are playing mother ; how touching !" she said. Noticing the viscount's constrained manner, she hastened to add : —

"My compliments to you ; your daughter is charming."

Chiffon seemed not to hear. She was gazing eagerly upon the young woman, who was a very pretty, well-rounded, dimpled little person, whose brown hair curled over a low brow with soft outlines. She had big, caressing, chocolate-colored eyes, a correct nose, a very small mouth, charming if she kept it closed, and a superb complexion. Her shoulders rose white and plump from her excessively *décolleté* gown. The upper part of her arm was too full, and her flat, colorless ears were not well put on ; they were too slanting, and too far forward.

Such as she was, Chiffon understood, although she herself did not care at all for that style of woman, that Madame de Liron was

very pretty, and would be pleasing to most people. As Marc made no answer, the young woman went on : —

“ I hope you will have something pink for for her ; nothing but pink becomes such skins as hers ; and *à propos*, it would be at least polite of you to tell me how you like my gown.”

“ Very successful,” he said, almost indifferently.

“ From the way you say it, one can scarcely believe you. It is for to-morrow, for your sister-in-law's ball ; but we dine together to-night, I believe, at the Barfleurs' ? ”

“ No ; I seldom dine out, as you know ; and just now I am in mourning.”

“ True ; I have not seen you since your return.”

“ I only returned the day before yesterday, and I am making no visits.”

“ I know.”

She crossed the room, and took up some material that was spread out on an arm-chair. As she passed the viscount she said in an undertone : —

“ But you will manage to see me in some way ? ”

Marc looked furtively at Chiffon, trying to make out whether she had overheard. Very pale, with lips closed and eyes on the ground, immovable as a statue, the child seemed unconscious. A quick pulsation in her temples was the only sign of life, and Marc thought she had noticed nothing.

Madame de Liron, coming back after examining the material, inquired, "Your brother and sister dine there this evening, do they not?"

"My brother is ill; my sister-in-law will go with my niece."

"Oh; that will be her *début*, will it not? I am charmed that I am to meet her to-night."

Chiffon bowed haughtily. "She is not like me. Since I have known that she was to be there, it has seemed still more odious to me."

"Tell me, Madame Bertin," said Uncle Marc to the dressmaker, "when may I talk with you? I am in great haste. I want a frock for my niece, and I want it at five o'clock. It is now half-past one."

"I will give Madame Bertin up to you," said Madame de Liron; "I have no further need of her," and she left the room.

"Well," said Marc, "what can you do for me?"

"Of course you know, Monsieur, that we cannot make a gown for you before five o'clock. The best we can do would be to try one of our models on to Mademoiselle d'Avèsnès; and if there is one that comes anywhere near her, we can make some alterations in it for this evening."

"But are your models fresh?"

"Oh, they have been tried on in order to show them to our patrons; but we have some that are quite fresh."

"There is a little pink gown"—she said, looking at Coryse.

"No!" cried Coryse, "not pink; I don't want pink!"

Madame de Liron had suggested to Uncle Marc that she have pink, and that alone was sufficient to decide her to choose any other color.

"Is there any particular shade which you prefer, Mademoiselle?"

"Anything you choose," said Coryse, "except pink;" then she added, "however, I am fond of white."

One of the assistants brought a white

mousseline de soie. Madame Bertin opened the door of an adjoining room, and showing the way to Coryse, said:—

“Will you try this one on?”

Noticing that Uncle Marc did not move, she said, “Are you not coming too?”

Uncle Marc followed the dressmaker, and seated himself in one corner of the fitting-room, where Chiffon was just stepping out of her gown which lay at her feet. She looked very dainty in a little short skirt and a silk jersey, the garment to which she fastened her stockings. Her Uncle de Launey, who had had charge of her physical training, had never permitted her to wear either corsets, garters, or low shoes. He considered all three both ugly and detrimental to health.

“Nothing,” he used to say, “injures the flesh and the figure like corsets and garters; and nothing spoils the ankle and the instep like low shoes.” In extremity, he would consent to the corset and the low shoes to hide imperfections; the garters, never. So Chiffon had had freedom to grow; and when at the age of twelve her mother took her again and wanted, to use her own expression, “to form her figure,” Chiffon, incapable of bearing the least

pressure, fought so hard against it that they were obliged to yield to her.

"I want to be myself," she had said, "with the figure which God Almighty gave me, and which is my own! I don't want to copy my neighbors. I don't say that mine is better, but I prefer it; at any rate, I don't look as though I had swallowed a cane," then, with a furtive glance at Madame de Bray, she had said:—

"A large bust with large hips and a small waist is horrible to me. It has the effect of a pillow with a string tied around it."

When Chiffon had put on the simple little gown, with the thin gauzy skirts which hung one above another straight to the floor, and with a bodice which was gracefully draped over her firm, well-shaped bust, Madam Bertin exclaimed:—

"That gown is just the thing! There are not three stitches to be taken in it; but anything looks well on a pretty figure, and Mademoiselle has a figure; has she not M. le Vicomte?"

"Yes, she has," murmured Marc, who was looking on enraptured at Chiffon's transformation.

In this elegant, well-made gown, from which her shoulders rose firm and pink, the child looked so utterly different, that Uncle Marc said to himself, pleased, but a trifle annoyed at the same time: "They will not recognize her this evening."

At that moment the door opened, and Madame de Liron put her head in, and said: —

"Do you need any advice?"

"No, thank you," replied Marc dryly, and turning very red.

When the young woman caught sight of Coryse, she was petrified in the presence of this complete transformation; her pretty laughing face assumed an evil expression of alarm; and as she pushed the door shut with a bang, she said to the viscount: —

"It is quite evident that you are enjoying yourself."

Coryse half closed her eyes, and said gently: —

"Madame de Liron is demonstrative, is she not?" And a quarter of an hour later, as she trotted along the *Rue des Girondins* by Uncle Marc's side, she said, without mentioning the young woman's name, but sure that he, too, was thinking of her: —

"At any rate, she is quite at home with you."

And he answered haughtily:—

"That is her manner." The child shook her head, and murmured seriously:—

"There are shades, and shades."

CHAPTER XII.

As Uncle Marc had predicted, they scarcely recognized Chiffon, and she made a triumphal entrance into the Barfleurs' drawing-room. Lacking in confidence though she was, she was nevertheless conscious of the effect she produced. She laughed in Madame de Bassigny's face, when she saw her look of amazement and vexation.

"It doesn't please her that I should look so well," she thought.

As for the marquise, she was simply ecstatic over the sensation produced by her daughter. Not fundamentally bad, but only vain and foolish, she enjoyed to the fullest extent anything which contributed in any way to her own importance, or which brought her into prominence. She was flattered by Chiffon's success. The long faces of her excellent friends, Madame de Bassigny and Madame de Liron, delighted her ; and she looked kindly upon Chiffon, who, with a little court about her, was receiving compliments with a rapid-

ity which astonished rather than frightened her.

The Barfleurs perceived this unexpected transformation with some uneasiness. They thought, that even though Chiffon's family might have been willing to give her to them when she was merely rich, they might refuse her now that she was also beautiful. Madame de Barfleur, irritated at seeing M. de Trêne of the hussars, M. de Bernay, and Count de Liron, brother of Madame de Liron's husband, and the greatest catch in their part of the country, all in an eager group about Coryse, called the girl graciously to her, and made her sit down by her side in order to keep an eye on her. Chiffon immediately complied. It was a matter of indifference to her whether she was in one place or another, so long as she had neither Uncle Marc, nor her father, nor any one she was fond of, to talk with. To be sure, there were her cousins, Geneviève and her brother; but Coryse had never been very intimate with Geneviève, a knowing young girl two years older than herself, already an adept in the arts of deception and of coquetry.

At length Madame de Barfleur, hearing the

wheels of a carriage upon the gravel, exclaimed : —

“Oh ! here he is ! I was afraid he had not returned.”

Chiffon, who was waiting with indifference the arrival of the last guest, was very much astonished to see the Duc d'Aubières come in ; and she was so delighted to see her old friend, that she arose with a bound and ran to meet him, saying : —

“Oh ! how delighted I am to see you !”

The colonel started in surprise, as he did not immediately recognize Coryse in the stunning young woman who received him so cordially. But when he caught sight of the fluffy hair, and the beloved little face which was smiling upon him, and realized that it was really Chiffon who was before him, his long, serious face expressed such astonishment, that Coryse, divining its cause, exclaimed : —

“What ! even you do not recognize me ?” Suddenly she perceived that they were looking curiously at her ; and she heard Madame de Bassigny say, as she leaned toward the marquise : —

“Your daughter is not cool towards her rejected suitors, is she ?”

"She is ridiculously childish for her age," replied Madame de Bray, irritated at Chiffon's manner; and Chiffon thought:—

"Well, this time, at least, they have a right to give me a dig; that certainly was tactless."

The Duc d'Aubières was agitated and embarrassed. He had not expected to find Chiffon there, for she never went anywhere; and he was far from expecting to see her so well-dressed, and so grown-up. Her long hair, which hung about her shoulders, was the only remaining trace of the child he had left.

As he looked at her, he began to regain his self-possession, and felt more resigned to giving her up than though he had found her in all respects the same as when he had seen her last. If for one brief moment he had felt himself very near to the little Chiffon without fortune, he found himself at an infinite distance from Mademoiselle d'Avèsnès, with her prospective riches.

She seemed to him now like another incarnation of a being he had loved in a former existence, long, long ago. He looked at her in astonishment and respectful curiosity, and gradually he felt that the passion which had

drawn him toward "little Chiffon" was growing less.

"What is the matter with you to-night, Colonel?" asked Madame de Bassigny sharply. "Has your journey tired you? You look as though it had."

"It must be a look which is natural to me. It is certainly not fatigue."

Madame de Barfleur, much as she desired to, could not put Coryse at her son's side. She wanted to keep her away from the disturbing influence of the handsome Trêne or of M. de Bernay, both eligible young men, and fortune-hunters; so she placed her between the Duc d'Aubières, who she knew was not dangerous, and M. de Liron.

During dinner, Chiffon, delighted to be near the colonel, talked gayly of matters that interested them both, — of Uncle Marc, of Gribouille, and of Josephine, and also of painting and art matters; for M. d'Aubières was much more cultured and intelligent than most of the men she knew. Toward the end of the meal, when the conversation was pretty general, and no one was paying any attention to them, Chiffon repeated in an undertone the story of the Barfleurs' machinations, Father Ragon's

insinuations, and all the small maneuvers with which she had had to contend.

"What does Marc say to all this?" said the duke.

"He finds it idiotic, as you may imagine. However, it was his wish that I should come here to-night; and it was he who gave me my gown. I don't know what's the matter with Uncle Marc, but lately he is quite changed; he is not at all the same to me."

"In what way?"

"I cannot explain it exactly. He is whimsical; he picks me up when I don't deserve it. It amounts to nothing; but it is something, all the same."

"I am going to see him to-morrow morning. I bade him such a hasty adieu, the day I went away" —

"*Apropos* of that," said Chiffon, raising her bright eyes timidly to the duke's, "you are no longer distressed, I hope?"

"I can hardly say that, but I have grown sensible; and I thank you for having been wise for both of us."

"That is right," she said, and added after a moment's hesitation: —

"You say that you are coming to see Uncle

Marc to-morrow ; you know the races take place to-morrow ? ”

“ Yes ; but I shall see Marc in the morning.”

“ And you know there is to be a ball at our house in the evening ? It will be such a bore ! Ah, *à propos*, the little prince you sent us is very nice ; I say *à propos* because the ball is given for him.”

“ You like my little prince, then ? ”

“ I began by finding him a bore ; but we have become very good friends.”

After dinner, Madame de Barfleur begged Chiffon to assist her son in serving the coffee.

“ Do you allow smoking, ladies ? If you do, we can keep the gentlemen with us.”

Coryse, who had been hoping that the smoking-room would rid her of Hugh de Barfleur's languorous airs and mysterious whisperings, made a face, and went and sat down in a corner alone ; while Geneviève de Lussy, who with Madame de Liron was the center of a group of admiring men, was flirting in the manner of a woman of the world. After a short time, Madame de Bray motioned to Chiffon to come to her, and said to her angrily :—

"Don't stay off in a corner without talking, as though you were piqued at something ; you look like a perfect goose."

"What can I talk about ?"

"Anything ; only mingle in the conversation."

The child sat down again perplexed. She did not know how to talk about nothing ; and occupied hitherto as she had been with childish things, or with things intellectual, she was embarrassed at having to take part in a conversation that was nothing but small-talk. So she remained silent, seeking in vain for a chance to say something. Finally she gave up trying, and began to think of other things in spite of her mother's indignant glances.

While she was dreaming of Uncle Marc, who at that very moment, she supposed, was reading his newspapers, or of Gribouille who must be having his supper, she noticed a stir in the drawing-room. Following a discussion on the authenticity of a portrait of Henry IV., which hung opposite where she was sitting, little Barfleur had taken an enormous lamp, which he carried with difficulty, and climbing upon a chair, was trying to light the picture as best he could. The face of the king, strong

and energetic, peered forth from the dark old canvas. Chiffon, looking at his ugly, but at the same time attractive, head, exclaimed amiably : —

“There is a man who has not the phiz of a Protestant — Henry IV !”

This was coldly received ; and Chiffon, perceiving it immediately, remembered that the Lirons were Protestants ; and attempting to turn the conversation, said : —

“He is to blame for my ridiculous name.”

“Ridiculous name ! what do you mean ?” asked little Barfleur graciously.

“Corysande is my name ; did you not know it ?”

“Yes, Mademoiselle, yes ; but it is not a ridiculous name ; it is charming.”

“That is a matter of taste.”

“And why is Henry IV. responsible for your having a name you do not like ?”

“He is, in a way ; because it was given me in remembrance of the beautiful Corysande.”

Seeing that the viscount did not understand, she added : —

“You know who she was.”

“Perfectly,” he replied, somewhat dubiously.

"You don't seem very familiar with the story. The beautiful Corysande was the Countess of Guiche, and she was the god-mother of one of the Avèsnès in 1589; and from that time all the Avèsnès have called their daughters Corysande, so the tradition goes."

"Exactly; but I do not see how Henry IV. is concerned in it."

"Henry IV. is concerned in it because of the celebrity of the beautiful Corysande, by reason of which it was a distinction to have her for a god-mother. And her celebrity came through Henry IV., didn't it?"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Madame de Barfleur, who was always fearing that the ignorance of her son would be brought to light.

Very ignorant herself, she realized her danger, and possessed in a high degree the ability to be silent, which women in a similar situation are apt to have.

The Duc d'Aubières, who was looking at the other portraits, asked, pointing to a general of the Empire:—

"Who is that?"

"That," said the viscount, looking indifferently at his ancestor, a stocky Hercules leaning on his sword, "that is my grandfather."

"Indeed," said Chiffon, struck with his appearance, "he does not look at all like you;" and continuing to examine General Barfleur with kindly interest, she added, "it is not astonishing that those men did great things."

"It is merely unfortunate," said the viscount sententiously, "that those great things were done for the glory of Bonaparte."

"For the glory of France," said Chiffon, correcting him.

"No," continued little Barfleur, happy to have at last found a subject for conversation. "They served only for Bonaparte's aggrandizement; and Bonaparte will never be in the eyes of the world anything but an usurper, an enemy of France."

"In the eyes of the world, did you say?" cried Chiffon, flushing crimson. "The Emperor an enemy of France? It was those who returned from Coblenz who dared to speak of him in that way; those who rejoiced to see France encroached upon in order to accomplish — what a result — Louis XVIII!"

"Louis XVIII. was a great king," announced little Barfleur impressively.

"A great king?" said Coryse, almost burst-

ing with anger. "A great king? You defend the king for the same reason that you go to mass, because it is the thing, and you think it is not the thing to be an Imperialist; they are all such swaggerers and blusterers."

"Thank you on behalf of the Imperialists, Mademoiselle Coryse," said the Duc d'Aubières, bowing and smiling.

Madame de Bray rushed at Chiffon, and said threateningly, but in an undertone:—

"Be quiet; you are perfectly ridiculous."

"That may be! Why do they amuse themselves by mocking my Emperor? Besides, you told me to talk, to say anything, only to talk."

Disturbed at the sight of her offspring plunged in another conversation, Madame de Barfleur suggested, seating herself at the piano, that the young people waltz. With one impulse the handsome Trêne, M. de Bernay, and Count Liron made a rush for Chiffon; but little Barfluer, who stood nearer than they, took possession of the girl.

As she felt his touch upon her waist, Chiffon's supple body stiffened; and, drawing back involuntarily, she said:—

"No—I"— She was about to say, "I am

going to dance with M. d'Aubières," and then signal to the duke to come to her rescue; but she decided it would not help her much. However vague her ideas of politeness were, she realized that she ought to dance at least once with the master of the house; so when he hesitated, abashed, she said:—

"Oh, nothing; come on."

If the heir of the Barfleurs was a poor talker, he was a beautiful dancer; and Chiffon felt a real pleasure in being carried across the big room. Suddenly her partner led her into the dimly lighted picture-gallery, where he said they would have more room.

"But the others," Chiffon suggested, looking to see if Geneviève de Lussy and Madame de Liron were following.

The viscount stopped, and beckoned to the waltzers to follow.

"They are coming," he said; and they were off again.

But they had the big, bare room to themselves. Madame de Liron did not care to waltz except for an audience; and Madame de Lussy, who knew her daughter only too well, did not allow her away from her maternal eye.

"Madame de Liron is considered very pretty, isn't she?" asked Chiffon abruptly.

Ever since morning the image of the young woman had haunted her, and she could not help speaking of her.

"Your uncle seems to consider her particularly so," said little Barfleur. "What do you think of her, Mademoiselle?"

"Too rotund — and you?"

"I?" replied the viscount, drawing Chiffon toward him with a slight pressure. "I do not see her. I see no one but you. It is you who are pretty to me, so very pretty! It is you whom I love," he added, under his breath.

Chiffon did not hear. Enjoying the pleasure of waltzing with a good dancer, she had yielded herself to it completely, and was leaning fearlessly upon the viscount's arm.

Encouraged by this abandon, he bent over her, murmuring with a voice which he tried to make passionate:—

"I love you."

He was so near her that she felt his breath stir her hair. She stopped short in her astonishment, and, drawing away in confusion and indignation, exclaimed:—

"You've made quick work of this!"

CHAPTER XIII.

"WILL you tell Corysande that she must go to the races?" cried the marquise, rushing into the library, where M. de Bray and Marc were smoking. "She insists that she will not go."

"But," said Chiffon, who came into the room behind her mother, "I do not see why I should have to go to the races; I have never had to go before."

"But you have not been a young lady before."

"Come, now, Chiffon," interrupted the marquise; "you are fond of horses."

"It is because I am fond of horses that I am not fond of the races. It does not amuse me to see a horse prancing about with a sprained foot, like the one we saw at Auteuil two years ago, the day you took me with you."

"But an accident like that is nothing serious."

"It would either be that or something else; and then that is not the only reason why I will not go to the races."

"You should not say 'I will not,'" observed M. de Bray.

"Why I do not wish to go to the races, then," said Chiffon, accepting his correction.

"What is your reason?"

"I hate to be always in the midst of a lot of people. I like to be quiet; to be let alone to stay with my animals." Looking affectionately at her step-father and uncle, she added, "or with you two. This morning it was mass; now it is the races; and to-night the ball. All that is too much for one day."

"Mass! she puts mass in the same list with the other things," cried Madame de Bray, raising her eyes to heaven.

Chiffon bristled.

"Yes, certainly; the kind of mass we had this morning. You would not let me go to Saint Marcien, on the pretext that you needed Jean to help you at home, on account of this evening. You took me with you to the Jesuits; and with them, mass is no mass at all; it's a five-o'clock tea in the morning. People are chatting, and they all go into the garden after it is over; so that to-day you spoke to more than fifty people."

"But you spoke to them too. I don't see what you are complaining of."

"That very thing, bless your soul."

"I do not see how you can find it tiresome to meet the people in your own set."

"That is a matter of taste; it makes my hair stand on end; and after seeing them this morning at mass, and again to-night at the ball, I shall have had my fill of society; moreover, if you insist upon my going to the races, and if I have to spend the whole afternoon in the open air, I shall fall asleep in the midst of the ball to-night."

"That child is perfectly incapable of polish," sighed the marquise, utterly discouraged. "It is useless to try to influence her," and she slammed out of the room.

"Oh," said Chiffon, throwing herself onto the couch, "I am so sick of it all."

"I do not understand," began M. de Bray, "why you do not wish to go with your mother to the races. You" —

"What! you do not understand? Go yourself for once, and see how you like it."

"It is different with me; I have a frightful cold; I have just got out of bed, and I am not presentable."

"And I am still stupid after my last night's dinner."

"Oh, by the way, how did your dinner go off?" asked Uncle Marc.

"It was tiresome; but fortunately M. d'Aubières was there, otherwise"—

"Ah," said the marquis, "is Aubières back?"

"Yes," replied Marc; "he was here this morning while you were out. He wanted to see you; to offer his excuses for not returning the other evening to say 'good-night' to you and your wife, after his walk in the garden with Chiffon. He was hardly in the humor, poor fellow." With an amused smile, he continued, "You know, don't you, what Chiffon said to him in the course of that walk? You could never guess. Very sweetly and prettily she said: 'I would rather have you know why I do not wish to marry you. It is this: it is because I am sure that if I did marry you, I should deceive you.'"

"How perfectly ridiculous!" said M. de Bray, laughing too.

Coryse shrugged her shoulders. "It amuses you, does it? Do you think it would have been better to let him imagine all kinds of things?"

"I do not see how he could have imagined anything worse," said Uncle Marc.

"Is he angry with me?" she asked, a trifle disturbed.

"He? Oh, no, poor fellow; he does not dream of such a thing."

"I am glad of that; I thought it was not possible that he was angry. He was too nice during the dinner; I had the good luck to be placed beside him."

"Did everything go off well?"

"Did not mamma tell you?"

"I only saw your mother at breakfast. You were there; you know we did not speak of yesterday."

"Well, I made several breaks. In the first place about Henry IV.; we were looking at his picture, and I said that there was nothing of the Protestant in his phiz; and on account of the Lirons, you know, that was not very well received."

"Was that all?" said Uncle Marc.

"No; there was something else; but that was my mother's fault. She called me to her and said that I must talk, talk even if I had nothing to say; so as soon as I thought of anything, you can imagine I jumped at it. I got angry, and I said things I ought not to have said. It came about, *àpropos* of Napoleon."

"Oh," said Marc in alarm, "if they attacked Napoleon" —

"Yes; you know how that makes my blood boil."

"Did you go too far?"

"Perhaps I did; but in any case I was more polite than the master of the house."

"How did that happen?" said the marquis, very much interested. "M. de Barfleur is courtesy itself."

"Not always with me."

"What has he done to you?"

Chiffon blushed at the memory of the night before, and replied: "He was too familiar. It happened when we were waltzing; he took me into the picture gallery, with the excuse that there was more room there, and then, — let me see, what happened next? Oh, yes; he began by saying that Madame de Liron was too plump, that is to say, — no, I'm mixed, it was I who said that; and then he said that I was pretty; that no one else was pretty to him." Here she stopped, and Uncle Marc asked with some uneasiness: —

"What then?"

"Then suddenly he leaned toward me and said," — imitating the voice and manner which

little Barfleur had adopted for the occasion, she murmured, — “‘I love you.’”

Her intonation was so funny that Marc laughed in spite of his annoyance; and Chiffon asked, turning to him and to her stepfather: —

“Do you think that was nice? Do you suppose this philandering will last long?”

“What philandering?”

“On the part of little Barfleur. I don't want to put on airs, but I am not flattered that any one should imagine that I would marry that man.”

“He is not so bad,” said the marquis timidly.

“Not so bad,” said the child with annoyance; “but he is absurd, and he looks so sickly, and he dresses so ridiculously, and he uses perfumery, heliotrope in the bargain! Could anything be worse?”

“*Mon Dieu!* Are there no circumstances under which a man may use a little perfumery?”

“No!” cried Chiffon, her voice rising; “a man has no right to smell of anything but tobacco.” Turning to Uncle Marc, she said, “That makes you laugh; does it amuse you?”

As for you, you have been horrid to me like the rest of them. Yes, horrid. It began some time ago ; but for the last few days it has been worse. Ever since the night when that odious little Barfleur dined here."

Although the viscount protested, she continued nervously : —

"Oh, I do not say that you have not been kind to me, as far as giving me things goes ; for example, you have given me a gown, a very beautiful one. I shall wear it to-night, because it has much more style than the one papa gave me. Oh, yes, you give me things ; but as for loving me, you don't seem to any more !"

"But I do."

"Oh, no, you don't. If you were very fond of me, would you want me to marry a monkey like little Barfleur ?"

"I have said nothing in his favor."

"Nor anything against him either ; and I don't want him, the monkey ! I don't want him or anybody else ; so there ! It is your fault if they torment me, if they want to marry me ; yes, your miserable money is to blame for it ! If it were not for that, they would leave me alone in my corner as they used to." And

burying her face in her hands, she began to sob violently.

"Let her alone," said Marc to M. de Bray, who had approached her and was trying to talk to her. "Her nerves are upset; let us go away and leave her here to cry; it will do her good."

As soon as he had left the room, the marquis turned and looked at Chiffon who was still sobbing, and murmured: —

"She has never been nervous before, poor child; this is not natural to her; I should not be surprised if she were in love with some one."

"You are crazy," said Marc, with a dull fear. "Whom could she be in love with? Not with Trêne, surely, that insipid beauty who would beat his wife and gamble away her dot; nor with Bernay, she hates hypocrites; nor with Liron, he is a perfect fool."

"As his brother did not answer, he insisted: "With whom, then? With whom? with whom?"

And M. de Bray replied without perfect calmness, "How should I know?"

CHAPTER XIV.

"WHERE has Uncle Marc gone?" asked Chiffon, coming into the drawing-room a few minutes before the arrival of the guests. "I have looked for him everywhere, and he is not to be found."

"You know very well that he intends to bury himself for the evening," said the marquis. "What do you want of him?"

"I want to show him my gown. He has only seen me in it by daylight, and it is so much more becoming at night."

"You will have to show it to him some other time. He is grumpy to-night. It seems that nerves are the fashion to-day," he added, smiling.

"Yes," said Coryse, "I noticed at dinner that he was all out of sorts. What do you think is the matter with him?"

"He has a bad disposition," said the marquis.

"No, indeed," protested Chiffon; "he has not!"

"I think I'll go and look for him."

"No, no!" said Madame de Bray, who was not in a good humor. "Stay here; the guests will be coming soon." A look of gloom came over her bright face.

"Ah, *Mon Dieu!* that is true; it is ten o'clock. I wonder who will come first. I wager the stupidest of all. Tra-la-la. It's the Bassignys. Just as I had the words in my mouth."

And, sure enough, it was Madame de Bassigny, very much laced, in a striking silvery gown, followed by the colonel in a uniform a trifle small for him, and which had slipped up, forming a big plait across his shoulders.

Madame de Bassigny seemed annoyed at being the first to arrive. She did not consider it good form, and threw the blame for it upon the colonel. In a significant tone she asked Coryse if the political discussion of the night before had kept her awake.

The girl replied that she always slept well, even after the most wearisome evening; and then the arrival of the guests interrupted the conversation, which was becoming a little sharp.

Little Barfleur entered close by his mother's

side, and was evidently disturbed as to the possible results of his declaration. He admitted to himself that he had gone rather too far, and had struck a false note.

Chiffon's indifferent reception of him reassured him, and he soon regained his composure; he flew hither and thither, prattling with this one and that one, and seemed to be everywhere at the same time. The arrival of Count d'Axen had the effect of a douche upon him. He began by examining him with great respect, awed to a certain extent by the presence of a real prince; but he soon forgot the prince, and saw only a rival. The appearance of this fellow, younger and better looking than himself, considerably diminished his own prestige.

As soon as the orchestra began to play, little Barfleur advanced towards Coryse; but, as he reached her, she was being whirled away by Count d'Axen. He was pained to observe that the prince waltzed as only the people of his country know how to do. And to-night he was having not only the success to which by virtue of his position he had a right, but he was having equally deserved success as a man; and for that little Barfleur

could find no consolation. He rushed up to Madame de Liron as she came in, — followed by her husband and her brother-in-law, — brilliant, striking, and lovely, in the pink gown that they had seen at the dressmaker's, and asked for the next waltz. But Madame de Liron was especially anxious to be seen by Count d'Axen at her best, and she knew that women who dance with small men are at a disadvantage ; so she replied, with some irritation at his untimely haste : —

“ By and by ; I have just come ; give me a chance to breathe ; ” then, turning to the marquis, she said : —

“ Is it really true that your bear of a brother is not here ? ”

“ It is perfectly true. ”

“ And he will not appear ? ”

“ And he will not appear. ”

“ Is he up-stairs ? ” she said, raising her eyes to the ceiling. “ Above all this hubbub ? ”

“ Yes. ”

“ What is it to her ? ” wondered Coryse, looking at the young woman in her fresh toilet, and her tiara of diamonds.

Nothing about this plump doll with her wicked eyes, and her rather common outlines, was agreeable to Chiffon.

"It seems that they consider her pretty," she thought, as she saw the enthusiasm which the little Liron excited; and she made a pathetic effort to understand this admiration, which she could not explain. The Duc d'Aubières came up to her.

"What are you thinking of, Mademoiselle Chiffon; you look like a little conspirator."

Coryse blushed.

"Of nothing."

"You seem preoccupied, and a little somber, if that ugly, black word may be applied to you;" and as the girl stammered out a meaningless reply, he asked affectionately:—

"Are you annoyed at anything? Has something gone wrong?"

"No; nothing at all," said Chiffon promptly, wishing to put an end to this questioning which embarrassed her—she knew not why. She asked in her turn:—

"So you think Uncle Marc is sure of his election?"

"I think so; but he does not seem to bother himself much about it. I saw him this morning, and he did not say three words about it. He seems to have forgotten that it is next Sunday. He, too, seems preoccupied."

"Oh," said the girl uneasily; and the thought immediately followed, "can it be because of Madame de Liron that he is preoccupied?"

The colonel noticed Chiffon's wandering gaze, and her tightly drawn lips.

"You are off again, Mademoiselle Chiffon; you are far away in the land of the blues."

"Not so bad as that," she replied, hardly knowing what she said.

Little by little they had been drawing toward the big bay window which opened out upon the garden. The night was stormy; a leaden heat pervaded.

"It is stifling in here," said Chiffon, throwing back her heavy hair. And she stepped out, followed by M. d'Aubières.

"Look," cried the duke, glancing upward, "there is that fellow Marc, walking calmly to and fro in his room, with no idea that we can see him from below."

Chiffon looked, and saw Uncle Marc's tall silhouette which stood out very black in the bright frame of the window.

Madame de Liron came into the garden on the arm of M. de Bray. She also perceived the viscount.

"What a good joke it would be," she cried gayly, "to go up and say 'Good-evening' to your brother. What would you say to it?"

"Why," said the marquis embarrassed, "I hardly know."

"Yes; let us do it; will you? It would be very amusing. Are you with us, M. d'Aubières?"

"No, Madame; I should fear that my friend Marc would shut the door in my face."

"In mine too?" asked the young woman, smiling. "Would he refuse to admit me?"

Without waiting for an answer, she turned toward M. de Bray.

"If I should go up very softly by the staircase out of the library, it would be a good joke, would it not?"

"Excellent," murmured Chiffon, in a tone of extreme impertinence.

"Show me the way, M. de Bray; will you?"

"Madame, I have a multitude of things to attend to down here," explained the marquis, very much embarrassed by the *rôle* which the young woman was trying to make him play; "but d'Aubières will take you in charge."

"As far as the staircase," said the duke, smiling, and offering her his arm.

Coryse was left alone. The handsome Trêne, very slender in his hussar's uniform, came down the steps.

"At last I have an opportunity to speak to you, Mademoiselle."

Chiffon, who was hurrying to follow M. d'Aubières and Madame de Liron, stopped in some annoyance at being hindered in her project.

"But you have seen me before," she said dryly.

She had spoken in rather a high key. Marc's silhouette, which had disappeared for a moment, reappeared upon the balcony and remained motionless.

"I spoke to you as I came in, but I have not been able to compliment you upon your lovely toilette."

As Coryse did not answer, he went on impressively: —

"After all, is it the costume which is so lovely? I do not wish to pay you a trite compliment, Mademoiselle, by repeating what you must have heard a hundred times since last evening — but you are" —

"Charming," interrupted Chiffon with a laugh. "Yes; they all agree upon that." And

hastening to slip away, she added brusquely:—

“And if that is all you have to say to me”—

“But I wanted also to beg you to give me a waltz,” replied M. de Trêne, abashed.

“Which one?”

“Any which you will be good enough to give me; the next, if you will.”

“The next is Count d’Axen’s.”

“Again?”

“Again! What do you mean?” said Coryse, provoked. “Do you keep track how often I dance with this one or that one?”

She suddenly stopped; she felt that Uncle Marc was leaning over his balcony listening; but she dared not suggest such an idea by a glance in that direction.

“The second waltz, then?” she heard de Trêne say.

“That is M. d’Aubières’. Would you like the fourth from now?”

Count d’Axen came up, almost running:—

“This is my waltz, Mademoiselle Chiffon!”

The big shadow at the window moved uneasily. Coryse thought:—

“I wager that at this moment he is not in a good humor.”

"Mademoiselle," said M. de Trêne, "will you do me the honor of presenting me to Count d'Axen?"

"Will you allow me, Monseigneur?" she asked, turning to the prince. And as he bowed, she murmured: —

"Monsieur de Trêne."

"I am delighted to meet you, Monsieur," said Count d'Axen, extending his hand to the officer. "Next week we are to be comrades in the regiment. I am to take part in the maneuvers, and I am to march with you. Shall we waltz here on the terrace?" he said to Chiffon. "We can hear the music very well here; and it is stifling inside."

She complied, not daring to refuse; but fearing, without knowing why, that it would displease Uncle Marc, who still stood motionless upon his balcony. When they stopped, the prince said to Coryse: "I regret very much not to see your uncle this evening."

"He is in his room on account of his mourning," she murmured, with a furtive glance toward his window.

"He is a charming man; I have a great affection for him. We have taken a good many walks together lately, and horse-back-rides."

"What!" thought the girl, "he has never told me; he has not spoken of him since the other evening."

"M. de Bray has one of the finest minds I know; and an exquisite soul," the count continued.

"Has he not, Monseigneur!" cried Chiffon, ready to fall down and worship the prince.

"I shall be very glad," he said, "if the maneuvers are over in time to permit me to leave when he does."

"To leave?" said the girl in anguish, "to leave for where?"

"He has not told you, then?"

"Yes, yes," she said, wishing him to go on; "he has told me something" —

"Immediately after the election, M. de Bray is going to travel for two months."

"Ah!"

"He wishes to examine into the condition of the poor, to inform himself at first hand about various things; in a word, he wishes to do, and he will be able to do, a great deal of good. Mademoiselle Chiffon, your uncle is one of those rare men who spend their lives in doing fine things which they conceal as carefully as though they were crimes."

"I have told him that very thing," murmured Chiffon, holding on to herself to keep the tears back. The thought that Uncle Marc was going away upset everything.

After his return, if he were elected, he would go off to Paris, where the family did not go until spring; so she would not see him any more.

All at once the viscount, who had been leaning over the balcony rail, turned suddenly toward his room; evidently some one had just entered.

"It is she," thought Coryse, whose heart was beating fast. As soon as the waltz was over, she bowed to the prince, and threaded her way among the dancers into the library, where she climbed the old oak staircase which lead directly to the viscount's apartments, determined to see, to listen, to know something definite, no matter by what means. But suddenly she stopped. Her heart failed her.

"No," she said, "it would be dishonorable; and, besides, I know all I want to know."

The rustling of silk and of tulle warned her that some one was coming down the stairs. Rushing down the steps, she hid herself behind the staircase. Madame de Liron,

looking very festive, returned to the big drawing-room, exclaiming, in order to show that she was not trying to conceal her visit:—

“He was not at all pleased; if you will believe it, he was almost angry.”

“She is lying,” thought Chiffon. “He was delighted; she is trying to blind people.” And running up the stairs, she opened the viscount’s door without knocking. Seated before his table, his head leaning upon his folded arms, Marc did not hear her enter. With a clear but excited voice she asked angrily:—

“What has she been doing to you?”

At the sound of her voice, he rose, and said with displeasure:—

“What are you doing here, you?”

As she caught sight of the poor, distracted face turned toward her, Chiffon could only feel an immense tenderness for the uncle she loved so much. Forgetting everything, she said in surprise, and with deep feeling:—

“You have been weeping; why should you weep, *Mon Dieu*?” Then timidly she added, “Is it on her account? Tell me.”

“I do not know whom you mean by “her,” but I beg you will return to your flirtations

and your dances. Go and listen to the compliments of that brute, de Trêne, and waltz in the garden with Count d'Axen, since it amuses you ; but leave me in peace."

"In peace to weep?"

"To weep, if it amuses me."

Chiffon caught sight of two big open trunks in his dressing-room, and, utterly cast down, she asked:—

"Are you going sooner, then?"

"Sooner than what? How did you know that I was going?"

"Count d'Axen told me."

He gave a scornful laugh.

"Ah! do you talk of me when you are together?"

"Yes; he told me you were going to travel."

As he made no reply, she asked in a trembling voice which betrayed all her fears:—

"And what will become of me?"

Without looking at her, he replied in cutting tones:—

"You don't expect me to take you with me, do you? or to remain here on your account?"

"How you talk to me, Uncle Marc!" said Chiffon mournfully; and her eyes, clouded with

tears, were blue as periwinkles. "How harsh you are to me!"

"Why do you come here to torment me?"

She waited a minute before she answered, standing motionless in the middle of the room all pink and white in her snowy gown, which fell in straight lines from her waist, defining the pure outline of her strong young figure. Her blond hair, which was blown about her head by the air from the window, gave her the look of a little fairy, of a being strange and unreal. In spite of himself, Marc looked at her with an expression of immense tenderness in the depth of his eyes. Too near-sighted to see this look, Chiffon asked, after a silence: —

"And so, according to what the prince tells me, you are going away from here to do good deeds?"

He shrugged his shoulders; the girl went on: "I could tell you of one not far away which you might do; one that would be a very noble deed." As he made no reply, she murmured in a whisper that was a mere breath: "And that would be to marry me."

The viscount turned pale, and stepped toward her.

"What did you say?"

"You heard what I said."

Hoarsely he replied:—

"This is a strange subject for joking. It is not funny."

"Joking!" cried Chiffon, aghast. "God knows I love you above all else, and there are times when it seems to me that you love me above all else; and so I say to you, 'Marry me.'"

"Chiffon!" said Uncle Marc gently, taking the girl in his arms, "my Chiffon! Oh, how I love you! I love you! I love you!"

"You want me, then?"

He covered her face with kisses; trembling, she sighed:—

"It is so sweet to have you kiss me."

Then, with a laugh,—

"What will they say down-stairs when they know it?"

Uncle Marc looked at Chiffon, uncertain whether he could believe his senses. Leaning over her, his face close to hers, he murmured, as he kissed her again and again:—

"Ah, my child, if you knew how unhappy I have been! how despairing! how jealous!"

“Jealous? there was no need of that.”

And with a warm embrace she murmured tenderly, caressingly:—

“For I should be very much surprised if I should ever deceive you, dearest.”



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